A HISTORY OF PUNJABI LITERATURE

SANT SINGH SEKHON
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SAHITYA AKADEMI

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IT

A History of Punjabi Literature

A modern Indian language, Punjabi can trace its lineage to Baba Farid who wrote with amazing felicity of expression in the twelfth century A.D. Nourished by Sufis and saints and above all by the Sikh Gurus during the medieval period, Punjabi writing came into its own with the advent of the British rule when it found itself face to face with a formidable challenge of identity. The struggle for freedom from the foreign rule in which the people of the Punjab played no mean a part, lent it vigour and vitality, perceptive sensitivity and a variety of expression. The Punjabi writers have assimilated the influence of both the Indian and the Western writing and can claim a rich fund of creativity in every genre of literature.

The authors, Sant Singh Sekhon and Kartar Singh Duggal who are among the architects of the modern Punjabi literature have tried to recapitulate and tell the story of the development of Punjabi writing from the earliest to the present day with a rare sense of involvement and commitment.

A History of
PUNJABI LITERATURE

The sculpture reproduced on the endpaper depicts a scene where three soothsayers are interpreting to King Suddhodana the dream of Queen Maya, mother of Lord Buddha. Below them is seated a scribe recording the interpretation. This is perhaps the earliest available pictorial record of the art of writing in India.

From: Nagarjunakonda, 2nd century A.D.

Courtesy: National Museum, New Delhi.

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by

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Publisher's Note

The present volume, *A History of Punjabi Literature*, is the most recent of the Sahitya Akademi's series of histories of literature. It is a volume that has taken some years to prepare and the reasons are many: not only is it the first authoritative chronicle of its kind in English, it is also a major effort to provide an accurate profile of the ethos of Punjab, and the major themes of its writers.

The Sahitya Akademi is indeed fortunate that this publication has been authored by two eminent scholars and writers in Punjabi, Professors Sant Singh Sekhon and Kartar Singh Duggal. Though both of them have worked on the history, the work is not so much as co-interpreted as co-authored. It has been to the advantage to this history that they have presented the growth and major movements of Punjabi literature not as if these afford but one interpretive perspective but as something which can be seen from counter-pointing perspectives. This perhaps is how all histories, particularly histories of literature, will be written in the future where the often different assessments of different scholarly interpreters will themselves provide the reader with a more complete perspective of the matter under discussion.

The vitality of Punjabi literature, its rootedness in its landscape, and its concern with the totality of human experience is evident everywhere in this volume. While it will be of undoubted value to the student of Punjabi literature, we also hope that its vitality and readability will make it attractive to other readers as well.

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1

The Beginnings

Punjabi Language

Bhai Jodh Singh, an eminent Punjabi scholar and thinker, says, "Punjabi is drawn from the Vedic language. It retains a number of words and expressions obtaining in Vedic literature, which are not to be found in Sanskrit, which is a modified form of Prakrit".[1] Grierson in his celebrated work entitled *The Linguistic Survey of India,* seems to support this assertion when he says, "A number of words like 'pio' and 'aakhanda' in Punjabi are not to be found in Hindi" drawn from Sanskrit. F.E. Keay, a researcher in the Western languages, traces Punjabi back to 1000 B.C. According to him, Punjabi language originated during the same time as Marathi, which according to Kaka Saheb Kalelkar is the oldest amongst the modern Indian languages.

Similarly Punjabi has retained several words in the same form as they are found in Sanskrit, while their complexion has been changed in Hindi and other eastern Indian languages. Some instances are given below:

Sanskrit	*Punjabi*	*Hindi*
गौ	ਗਊ	गाय
त्री	ਤ੍ਰੈ	तीन
पोत्र	ਪੋੜ੍ਹਾ	पोता
प्रिया	ਪ੍ਰਿਜਾ	प्रिय
प्रिष्ठ	ਪਿਠ	पीठ
सप्त	ਸਤ	सात

[1]"Punjabi Boli te Gurmukhi Lipi", *Punjabi Dunya,* May 1951.

The nomenclature 'Punjabi', evidently, was given to the language after the region in which it was spoken came to be known as the Punjab. It is said that it was the Muslim invaders who had coined the name Punjab because it had five rivers flowing through it. Some attribute the name to Akbar who had Lahore as his capital for a few years. According to Bhai Vir Singh, it is not more than 600 to 700 years that the name Punjab came to be used for the land served by the rivers Jhelum, Chenab, Ravi, Beas and Sutlej.[2]

Like other modern Indian languages, Hindi, Marathi, and Bengali, the Punjabi language, in its present form, may be said to have developed between the ninth and the eleventh century of the Christian era, the period of an intermediate form of Sanskritic Indian languages, moving towards what may be called self-sufficient modern Indian languages. The language of the now extant work *Saneh Raso* (The Epic of Love), a poetic work of Addaiman of Multan written in the ninth or tenth century is decidedly a pre-Punjabi *apabhramsha*, in which many characteristic word-forms of modern Punjabi can be identified. According to an estimate, over three hundred words in the *Saneh Raso* are such Punjabi forms as are current to this day, with slight modification. It may, however, be stated, as per practice of the times, the language of this work must have tended to conform to the older idiom and diction. On the other hand, the spoken dialect of the period must have been even closer to the language of our times, analytical in contrast with the synthetic forms of literary languages.

The famous Siddha *yogins*, Gorakh Nath, Charpat Nath and others, are also deemed to have lived in that period. Gorakh Nath was not born in the Punjab but he is said to have cultivated and made friends with the people of the Punjab. A lot of his poetry conforms to Punjabi grammar and diction. For instance,

Khaya bhi mare,
Ankhaya bhi mare
Gorakh kahe sanjami tare

...

Jo ghar tyag kahave jogi
Ghar wasi ko kahe jo bhogi
Antar bhav na parkhe jogi
Gorakh bole moorakh sogi

---

[2]"Punjabi Boli da Nikas te Vikas", *History of Punjabi Literature*, Punjab University.

Gorakh Nath uses Punjabi words like 'rijhya', 'ulta', 'pulta', etc.

Says Dr. Mohan Singh, "In my books *Punjabi Sahitya da Sankhep Ithas, Gorakh Nath and Medieval Hindi Mysticism* and *An Introduction to Punjabi Literature,* I have determined Charpat Nath to have lived between A.D. 890 and 990, but it could be a little later.[3] Charpat is definitely a Punjabi poet because like other Punjabis, he uses ਠ in place of ਣ and ਣ in place of ਨ . Similarly he uses ਰ in place of ਲ and ਲ in place of ਰ.. By way of sampling Charpat's poetry:

Khaye peeje keeje bhog
Charpat kahe vigadio jog

...

Jan ke ajan hoye baat toon lai pachhan
Chela hoyan labh hoyega, guru hoyan haan.

According to Rahul Sankritayana, verses attributed to Gorakh Nath and his other contemporaries current in Punjabi forms should be taken as a kind of folk translation. In such transformations the verse line and the phrase remain more or less in their original forms, while older and archaic words are unintentionally changed into more familiar current idiom. In his chapter entitled 'Punjabi Sahitya da Ugwan Kaal' in *Punjabi Sahitya da Ithas,* Dr. Mohan Singh says that the following riddles and proverbs which have a medieval look and are without Persian and Arabic vocabulary can be attributed to this period:

Riddles

Ik raat aape baithi
Phulan di sej khilar
Aaya ohda gharwala
Oh gai udari mar

...

Ik rukh barah daal
Teeh teeh pattar daali nal

Proverb

Daal manh di, dhi shah di
Run kunjah di

...

Jeehdi kothi daane
Ohde kamle vi siane

---

[3] *Punjabi Sahitya da Ugwan Kaal,* Punjab University.

Folk-song

Channan de ohle kyon khadi?
Ni dheye kyon khadi?
Channan de ohle babal iyon khadi
Dhi war lodye
Dhiye kiho jiha ni, Rani kiho jiha
War lodye?
Jion taryan vichon chan ve
Channan vichon kahn,
Kanhya var lodye.

Some of the poetical forms popular during this period were: *slok, chaupade, dupda, chhand, dakhne, swaiya, kabit, ashtpadi, jhoolna, sohile,* and *paudi.*

Most likely, the language of the country to the east of Lahore at that period was not much different from Hindi, which was the spoken language of the region now called Hindi-speaking. In contrast with this, modern Punjabi can be said to have evolved from old Multani. And Sheikh Farid's verses as found in the *Guru Granth,* are a clear link in the descent of modern Punjabi from Multani dialect. Even in the modern period, it is a well-observed phenomenon that under the influence of Sikhism, the spoken language of east Punjab has been drawing closer to Central Punjabi. Political factors have also exercised such influence and the establishment of Sikh chiefdoms in what are now called the Ambala, Kurukshetra and Karnal districts tended to bring the spoken language of the area nearer to Central Punjabi.

Some forms of Central Punjabi, especially verbs in the past tense, are prevalent in modern Haryanvi and even in Urdu, which seems to have been a factor in the argument of Akhtar Shirani that Urdu had evolved from Punjabi.

Similarly, in Braj Bhasha and Rajasthani, many word-forms resemble those in Punjabi, for instance 'akhian' in Braj Bhasha and 'jasi' and 'karsi' in Rajasthani and verb-forms 'karda', 'janda' in Haryanvi, in contrast with *karta* and *jata* in Hindi, are only remnants of a common earlier language, Apabhramsha or Prakrit like Pali.

A later stage in the linguistic and literary development of North India is seen in the famous *Prithvi Raj Raso* by Chand Bardai, who was a court poet of Prithvi Raj Chauhan, the last Hindu ruler of

Delhi and who was taken as a prisoner to Ghazni along with his master, by Shahabud-din-Ghori in A.D. 1193. Dr. Mohan Singh has called the language of this work Punjabi-Hindvi and thus given it the honour of being perhaps the earliest literary work in Punjabi. But it would be going too far to accept this view. For the rule of Prithvi Raj Chauhan, who originally belonged to Ajmer, did not extend beyond the Sutlej in the north and probably the Sutlej in that period flowed many miles south of its present bed. Chand Bardai is said to have been born and brought up in Lahore, but even so, being a court poet of the ruler of Ajmer, he cannot be said to have preserved much of his Punjabi personality and culture. However, some of the poetic forms he employed like Bhujang, Paryat, Gatha, Sanak, etc. have been used later in Punjabi.

Sheikh Farid is known to have lived a long life of ninety-two years from 1173 to 1265. Thus his period is later than Chand Bardai's by only a half century. But the character of his language is very distinctly different from that of Chand Bardai s. It can be due to a possibility that Sheikh Farid's verses as found in the *Guru Granth* might have undergone a literary transformation. But some of the *slokas* of Sheikh Farid as found in the *Guru Granth* are also in the pure Multani of that age, as, for instance:

> Sabhana man manik thahan mul machangwa
> Je tau priya di sik hiau na thahen kahinda. SSS KSD

Gurmukhi Script

One reason why non-Sikh Punjabis resist owning Punjabi as their mother-tongue is because of its Gurmukhi script that has obvious sectarian overtones. One reason why a large majority of the Sikhs feel unduly attached to the Gurmukhi script is their belief that this script was devised by the Sikh Gurus. Both are gravely mistaken.

Gurmukhi script is a misnomer. It was not devised by any Sikh Guru. It is not known how it came to be called as such.

Recent researches have established beyond any shadow of doubt that the Punjabi language was fairly well developed in the twelfth century, when the noted Sufi poet Baba Farid Shakarganj wrote in it with remarkable proficiency. A developed language must have evolved a script of its own. The belief that the Gurmukhi script was introduced by the second Sikh Guru, Guru Angad Dev, is

utterly misconceived. Long before Guru Angad, Guru Nanak, the first Sikh Guru, wrote an acrostic called the *patti* or tablet in Rag Asa in which he used all the thirty-five alphabets of Gurmukhi script with their sound-values as these are current today. To inspire a poet of Guru Nanak's stature to attempt an acrostic, the script must be popular and in wide use.

However, there is no denying the fact that with the advent of Muslim rule in the Punjab, along with the Gurmukhi script Arabic script also came to be employed for writing in Punjabi. According to Professor Pritam Singh, the renowned scholar, "Since the time of Caliph Umar, the educational policy of the Muslims towards their conquered lands did not put any hurdles in the way of Muslim settlers and converts using local or national languages, provided these were written in Arabic script. Persian, Uzbek, Tajik, Turkish, Pashto, Baluchi, Sindhi, Western Punjabi (Lahandi), Kashmiri and Hindi are some of the languages which were extensively put in use by the Muslim writers. In fact, they were as good as pioneers in almost all these languages, but in each case Arabic or modified Arabic script was used, with the result that their original scripts along with the bulk of indigenous literary and cultural treasures preserved in these scripts were lost for good. Guru Nanak did not want this ancient land of his to be cut off completely from its cultural roots. He, therefore, decided to use the local script, later called Gurmukhi, for all his work. Thereafter, Gurmukhi script became the script of culturally resurgent, identity-conscious Punjab, tracing its roots to its own country rather than to Arabia or any other foreign land."

Gurmukhi alphabets are simple, fewer and most appropriate for the Punjabi language. There is one alphabet ੜ which is peculiar to the Gurmukhi script and takes care of a typically Punjabi speech sound. It has no corresponding alphabet in Devnagri script though it does have one in Arabic script. Similarly, Punjabi alphabets ਘ and ਝ have different sound values in Hindi and Punjabi.

While Guru Nanak employed Gurmukhi script for his scriptures and Guru Angad and other Sikh Gurus following him promoted it as best they could and thereby perhaps it acquired its present nomenclature 'Gurmukhi', the Sikh Gurus have little else to do with it. A Christian clergyman Father Newton who prepared Punjabi grammar in 1851 observes:

It is generally believed that Guru Nanak formulated the Gurmukhi alphabets. While it may be true that he modified some of them, the fact remains that these alphabets are very old. Out of 35 alphabets not less than 22 can be found in ancient edicts in their primordial forms and can be deciphered as such, 3 alphabets can be traced back to the fifth century B.C. and twelve to the third century B.C.

Writing in *Punjab Prakash* in 1936, Dr. Raghuvira says:

> Gurmukhi script like Devnagri (employed for Hindi, Marathi, Nepali) along with other scripts such as Sharda, Tibetan, Bengali, Oriya, Mewari, Nandi, Nagri, Takri and Gujarati, etc. is derived from some form of Brahmi with which we are not acquainted yet. Like some other Indian scripts, it is phonetic in nature. We write as we speak. Gurmukhi script is self-sufficient; it does not need support from any other script. In short, when we have an adequate script for a language, why must we think of anything else?

There is no truth in the assertion that Gurmukhi script has been derived from Devnagri script either. While comparing Gurmukhi script with Devnagri script, Sri G.B. Singh, a Punjabi researcher, has come to the following conclusion:

1. They have 2 alphabets in common.
2. They have 5 alphabets resembling each other.
3. Their 14 alphabets have nothing in common
4. Their 4 alphabets have some resemblance to each other.

As against this, the comparison of Gurmukhi script with Takri script shows:

1. The two scripts have 5 alphabets that are common.
2. Their 5 alphabets are similar.
3. Their 5 alphabets have some resemblance to each other.
4. Their 8 alphabets are altogether peculiar to the 2 scripts.

Gurmukhi is closer to Takri which is prevalent in the hilly region of the Punjab. Gurmukhi is also closer to Sharda. Grierson believes that Gurmukhi has been derived from Sharda. Whatever the origin of the Gurmukhi script, it seem, Gurmukhi and Devnagri are only distant cousins.

The Gurmukhi script takes care of all the sounds in the Punjabi

language. There is one alphabet for each sound. There is no alphabet which is used in writing but remains silent in reading.

Until the advent of the Arya Samaj in the Punjab, while there were ever so many Hindi and Braj manuscripts written in Gurmukhi script, there was not one Punjabi manuscript transliterated into Devnagri script. Punjabi was, of course, written in Persian script which was due to the prevailing practice of the Muslim rulers who used their own script for the languages of the lands conquered by them. They could not do away with the people's language because it was through their mother tongue that they could reach them. The script did not seem to matter. Guru Nanak's *Pran Sangli* is said to have been scripted in 'Turki script' but it is now being disputed if Guru Nanak ever wrote this work.

Before the coming into being of the Punjabi Suba, the politicians in the Punjab toyed with the idea of accepting Punjabi as the language of the State with Devnagri as its script. However, it did not work because it was found that a number of Punjabi sounds could not be rendered clearly through Devnagri script. ਐਸਾ in Punjabi written in Devnagri would become ऐसा . Similarly, ਲਾਹੌਰ would read as लाहौर .

It is argued that if Punjabi could be written in Arabic script before partition and continues to be written in Arabic script in West Punjab even today, why must we insist on Gurmukhi script alone for Punjabi? The script is the soul of a language. Writing Punjabi in Arabic script inevitably pushes it towards Urdu and Persian with the result that the authentic character of the language starts changing slowly and imperceptibly. This is happening with Punjabi in Pakistan today. This must unavoidably happen if Punjabi were to be scripted in Devnagri. The tendency would be to draw from Hindi and Sanskrit. And the language would get removed from its original character.

While it is accepted that Punjabi as a language is older than Hindi and Urdu, why must it adopt another script at the cost of its own script devised and perfected with use for several centuries?

Every language has its own script and it is best that it is written in it. In the words of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru:

> A change in script is a very vital change for any language with a rich past, for the script is the most intimate part of its literature. Change the script and different word pictures arise, different sounds and different ideas. An almost insur-

mountable barrier is put up between the old literature and the new and the former becomes a foreign language that is dead.

KSD

Punjabi Folk-songs

Folk-songs are the autobiography of a people. They are the oldest and newest form of a language and a store-house of its lore. Says the Punjabi maiden:

> If you must go to the battle front, oh rider of the blue horse!
> Carry me in your haversack
> And wherever the night falls, oh rider of the blue horse!
> Pull me out and take me in your arms.

This is the theme of a large variety of songs sung by the people of the Punjab. The Punjabis had trouble always in store for them. They had to fight many a battle—their own battles and the battles of their neighbours. And this has made the Punjabi woman fearless. She is bold. She asks her lover to carry her along even to the battlefield.

The life of a Punjabi damsel is usually a long tale of longings. Every Punjabi girl must dream of a soldier-lover. This spells separation, and endless waiting. Every day dawns with a new hope; every night lengthens with a loving dream. Seasons come and go. But spring has its own charm:

> The vine is in blossom! The vine is in blossom!
> Parrots are nibbling away at the blossoms.
> The vine is in blossom!
> The vine is in fruit! The vine is in fruit!
> But he who should eat it, is far, far away.
> The vine is in fruit!
> I go and ask the priest, I go and ask the priest
> With a trayful of pearls,
> I go and ask the priest.
> Open the *patri*, oh priest, pray open the *patri*,
> When will he, my jewel, return? .
> Pray open the *patri*.
> The priest opens the *patri*, the priest opens the *patri*
> In the month of Sawan will your jewel return.

The priest opens the *patri*
False is your *patri*, oh priest! False is your *patri*.
It's the month of Sawan and my jewel hasn't come.
False is your *patri!*
The vine is in blossom! The vine is in blossom!

For people who have to run the risk of their lives every day and whose entire career becomes an endless struggle with perils, it is not unnatural to grow superstitious or fatalistic. But the Punjabis seldom succumb to such practices. The Punjabi sweetheart is not needlessly scared. If her lover has not returned in the month of Sawan as promised by the priest, she tells him that his *patri* is false and his reading faulty. She is not worried about her faith or convictions.

This is, perhaps, the reason why for a student of Indian folklore, whereas Bengal and Assam are noted for magic and witchcraft, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh for superstitious beliefs and practices, the South and Maharashtra for fairs and festivals, the Punjab is known for folk-songs and folk romances. The long drawn-out songs tell the tale of the young Punjabi maiden trying to find an expression for her love, her longings and her aspirations. The songs of the peasant sweating in the fields are different. He is strong, hefty and stout-hearted. Like bubbles, his emotions rise from the depths of his heart and burst no sooner than they reach the surface in the form of short *tappas*. *Mahya* songs and *bolian* are particularly the favourites of the menfolk. They are usually a couplet or a single verse complete in itself though capable of forming a link in a chain.

Poetry comes like an inborn gift to the Punjabi child. Maybe it is the soil, may be it is the salubrious waters of the rivers, maybe it is the neighbourhood of the lofty mountains, it is the Punjabi youth's unique experience to feel an exhilaration, which finds expression in the rhythmic pattern of language sung and repeated as folk-songs. In the streets of the Punjab, the children sing as they play, in the courtyards the womenfolk sing as they work, out in the fields the men sing as they plough, and sow and reap and harvest the crop.

In the folk-songs of the Punjab, there is hardly any reference to the sea; there are few stories about boats and boatmen. They tell the tales of battles and brave warriors and sing the praises of the sword and the spear. There are stories of spotted scarfs, silken

skirts and swelling turbans. Fond lovers and fairy-like sweethearts. Punjab folk-songs describe festivals and fairs, fearless competitors in wrestling bouts and horse races. And there are stories of the farmer, the large-hearted, and of the rains which are usually kind and of crops which seldom let the peasant down. A Punjabi maiden wishes to live a fuller life. She must have *kohl* for her eyes. She must have silken ribbons in her hair. She must have scented *ubatna*[1] for her toilet. And if something happens that is contrary to her wishes, she refuses to touch the *ubatna*:

I have not used the *ubatna*.
Father, what a match you have chosen!
Short stature is not to my liking;
Standing on the roof as I see,
He looks like a stone rolling along,
I have not used the *ubatna*.
Father, what a match you have chosen!
Tall and lean and lanky!
His head is on one bed
And his legs on the other,
I have not used the *ubatna*.
Father, what a match you have chosen!
He is least like me;
I may bake eight, I may bake ten
Not a crumb is left for me.
I have not used the *ubatna*.

Another theme which recurs in Punjab folk-songs repeatedly is the abandon with which the Punjabi youth fall in love. This drama is enacted in the fields, amidst rich crops, in the thick jungles with rustling trees as witnesses, on the banks of rivers with the singing water in the background and the *trinjan*[2] under fanciful pretexts. This drama is played with the swing soaring high in the sky, with the cattle going astray in the fields, on the way to the temple for prayers and back. The love-lorn protagonists of this play sit on the terrace in the evening and wait, they watch the sky laden with stars at night, when drawing water from the well they sing songs of

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[1]An indigenous preparation for the body which makes it soft and fragrant.

[2]Women collected to spin, weave, do embroidery, gossip and play.

love. Heer met Ranjha on the river bank. Saheban met Mirza in the *madrasa*, Sohni met Mahiwal in her father's pottery.

A popular theme of Punjab folk-songs is a sister's love for her brother. The Punjabi equivalent for brother is *veer*—the brave. Saheban fell in love with Mirza, the renowned marksman, and left her home with her lover. They are chased. Seeing among the pursuers her own brothers, Saheban picked up her lover's quiver and flung it on the tree. Saheban was killed, her lover was slaughtered, but she had done her duty of sisterly love. A Punjabi sister sings the praises of her brother in the play-songs of her childhood and in the love-songs of her youth. Her brother is the only hope. When married, it is the brother who comes to rescue her from the callous treatment of the mother-in-law. The brother's horse is the best, the brother's house is the largest, the brother's crops are the richest, the brother wears a white turban, the brother is offered a chair in the court. And when this lion of a brother is married, the sister's joy knows no bounds:

As you ride the bridegroom's horse
A twain of brothers ride with you.
Ride, O darling of the mother!

Your sister is offering alms.
As you splice the *beri* tree
Your mother distributes sweets.
Ride, O darling of the mother!

As you go around the fiery ring
I stand by you and sing.
Ride, O darling of the mother!

As you sit in the basket,
Your father showers silver coins.
Ride, O darling of the mother!

As you bring home the bride,
Your sister is wrapped in joy.
Ride, O darling of the mother!

Couplet after couplet is thus linked to the chain and the song lengthens out.

Most of the folk-songs of the Punjab are loose-knit. There is always room for addition of fresh verses. With the passage of time, the

more beautiful lines are retained and the less lyrical are discarded and forgotten. There is a slender link connecting these verses with one another. And this keeps most of the folk-songs uptodate, so that they reflect the changing times with surprising authenticity:

That men with wives win battles,
Where it is written oh Firranghi, tell me.

Don't you go to the front
Your bad luck will also go with you.

Nine daughters shall I bear
To set at nought
Your earrings in the Chinese War.

Enjoining us to wear Khaddar
Gandhi himself has gone to jail.

The people of the Punjab express their needs, their hopes, their aspirations and their loves in beautiful folk-songs. They provide a sort of catharsis for them and then they busy themselves with hard work; their eternal struggle with the soil and their ever-pressing demand for enlistment in the forces. The folk-songs of the Punjab are an invaluable treasure of our country's heritage.

Similarly, folk romances have always had a place of pride in man's heritage. The love story of Yusuf Zuleikha figures in the Holy Quran. It is essentially the same episode that we have in the Biblical narrative of the sons of Jacob as it is related in Genesis 39. The Buddhists have their own version of the story in Kunala, the youthful prince of Emperor Ashoka and Tishya-rakshita, the king's scheming wife. The oldest version of the romance, however, is the Egyptian folk tale of the two brothers Appu and Bata and the former's unnamed wife.

Heer Ranjha and other pairs of folk-lovers have been commended in the Sikh scriptures. The Sufis believe that it is physical love which, at times, shows the way to spiritual love. Guru Bal Nath is said to have prostrated before the seat where Ranjha sat before he left to meet Heer. The mausoleum of Heer is a place of pilgrimage for the devout and the lover. In our own times, the devotion with which the people of Lahore perpetuated the memory of Buta Singh, shows how true love defies and wins over enmity and hatred as nothing else can do. All this is sung in folk-songs by the people of the Punjab.

The Punjabis have been called a spirit-born people. Situated on the most vulnerable border of the country, they have more than their normal share of adventure. For centuries, it has been their lot to bear the onslaughts of foreign invaders. And they never surrendered as such. It was always mutual give-and-take.

We find that apart from the indigenous love tales, we have a number of them borrowed from our neighbours. Laila Majnun, Shirin Farhad, Yusuf Zuleikha and Shah Behram belong to West Asia. Nala Damayanti, Roopmati Bazbahadur, Bharthari Hari belong to Central India, Sami Dhola to Rajasthan and Phulmo Ranjhu to Himachal Pradesh.

Yet they have been assimilated in the mainstream of Punjab folklore. Roopmati is as heroic and as tragic a character as Heer Syal. And the true romance of Buta Singh has shown that love and even supreme sacrifice are not the values of days gone by, we do have Heers and Ranjhas this day and in this age.

Unless it is designed to be a fantasy like the one we have in Shah Behram, the folk romances are said to tell the story of lovers who actually lived and suffered the travails in their pursuit of true love. The poets telling the story give it a turn here and a turn there according to their own fancy. Demodar says, he saw with his own eyes the love-drama of Heer Ranjha enacted in his life-time. Damodar, a Hindu, fancied Ranjha as a flute-player in the image of Krishna the god-lover. In the tradition of Hindu classics, the story of Heer, according to Damodar, is a comedy; Heer and Ranjha are united in the end and they leave on a pilgrimage to Mecca. Waris Shah was a Shia Muslim, the story of Heer told by him is a tragedy. Heer is poisoned by her parents treacherously and Ranjha dies of the shock. Heer-Ranjha, Sohni-Mahiwal and Mirza-Saheban, all the three leading pairs of lovers of the Punjab lived on the banks of the river Chenab, known as Jhanan in Punjabi. It is maintained that it is a charmed river; people drinking its water lose their heart.

It is seldom that the path of true love runs smooth in Punjab folklore. What happened to Buta Singh the other day was witnessed by our generation on both sides of the border. Maybe true love is its own reward; the agony of it, the ecstasy of it.

Political considerations led to the division of the Punjab in 1947. The land of the five rivers was split into two. Its population was exchanged. Its waters were divided. Its assets were shared. But

one thing which escaped division is the folklore and folk-songs of the people of the Punjab. Even today a visit to the graves of Muslim saints in the Indian part of the Punjab is believed to heal the sufferings of the Hindus and Sikhs. And in the Pakistan part of the Punjab, Muslim women sing folk-songs in which a Punjabi maiden wishes for a bridegroom as beautiful as Krishna:

Why stand you under the sandalwood tree, my daughter?
I wait for you, O father,
It's time to look for a groom.
What sort of a groom would you have, my daughter?
One like the moon in the stars,
And Krishna among the lunars, O father.

Punjab, the land of five rivers, has been divided and subdivided. The division of the province in 1947 was cruel; no less callous was the one that followed later in 1966 to carve out a puny Punjabi-speaking state after the narrow designs of its authors. Not that such incisions had not been known earlier, but the trend of late has unfortunately been towards disintegration alone.

However, the more the land and the people have been divided, the more they have clung to their common heritage, their folklore; their folk-songs and folk romances. The tender concern for the Punjabi language witnessed in West Punjab today is a heart-warming phenomenon. Such a thing couldn't have been imagined a few years ago with the obsession with Urdu of the majority community in undivided Punjab.

Punjab folk-songs and folk romances have been a perennial inspiration to poets of the soil whether one is Bhai Gurdas or Waris Shah, Puran Singh or Mohan Singh, Amrita Pritam or Shiv Batalvi.

KSD

2

Sheikh Farid (A.D. 1173–1265)

Rise Oh! Farid! do your ablutions
And say the morning prayers.
Behead the head that does not bow before the Lord.

It is early morning, some eight hundred years ago. In a small village named Khotwal, near Ajodhan, in West Punjab, an old man and his wife are worried. The lady of the house has just discovered that there are no sweets in the house and their child would not say his prayers without the promised prize. The understanding is that the mother keeps sweets beneath the prayer-mat; this serves as a bait, as it were, for the child. He would get up and after he has said his prayers, he starts eating sweets. The child is fond of sweets. The shops are closed and the neighbours are asleep. The old father has a rustic sense of humour. "We collect some pebbles from the street and deposit them beneath the prayer-mat," he suggests. "And if he discovers it, he would never say his prayers", the mother voices her fears. "No", says the father, "he looks for the prize only when he has earned it, after finishing his prayers. By that time, the shops in the bazaar will open and we shall buy him sweets."

The trick works. Farid wakes up at the appointed time and making sure that his prize has been duly kept beneath the prayer-mat, he starts saying his prayers. The old man, his father, is happy in the heart of his hearts. The moment he finishes his prayers, the child lifts the corner of the prayer-mat and pulls out the prize bag. As he takes the first helping, the mother stops him, "No, son, they are not sweets; your father has gone to the bazaar to bring them." "But they are sweets," the child insists; he starts munching the piece in his hand. "It's sweeter than ever. What is wrong with it?" To her astonishment the mother finds that it is no handful of

pebbles. They are sweets. As sweet as candy. A miracle had taken place.

From that day, Sheikh Farid came to be known as Ganj-i-Shakkar, the store-house of candy. The real name of Sheikh Farid was Farid-ud-Din Masood. He was given this name after the great Sufi poet Farid-ud-Din Attar. Sheikh Farid was born in A.D. 1173. His father's name was Sheikh Jamal-ud-Din Suleman. His mother was a God-fearing lady. Her name was Kulsum Bibi. Sheikh Jamal-ud-Din had three sons and a daughter. Sheikh Farid was the second son.

Sheikh Farid was born at a time when the Muslims were trying to establish their rule in India. A large number of Islamic scholars and religious leaders came and settled here. Some believe that they had been driven to India by Chengiz Khan, who was at that time active in West Asia. It seems more probable that they were invited by the conquerors to propagate the Muslim way of life in the country of their domicile. They were granted liberal endowments and settled in various parts of the country. Some of the more important centres of Islamic learning in Northern India were Delhi, Panipat, Hansi, Uch and Multan. Sheikh Farid's father had settled in Khotwal. When Farid grew up, he shifted to Multan for higher studies. Multan attracted eminent scholars from Iran and Baghdad.

It was at Multan that Farid came across his spiritual mentor, Hazrat Qutb-ud-Din Bakhtiar Kaki. He took Farid along with him to Delhi where they met Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti, the greatest name among the Muslim men of God belonging to the time.

It is said that Farid underwent severe penance and asceticism under Khwaja Qutb-ud-Din's stewardship. He hung himself upside down in a well for forty days. He neither ate nor drank but remained attuned to the Almighty. There are a number of references to this experience:

Says Farid,
My bread is made of wood,
And hunger is my sauce;
Those who eat rich food,
Will suffer severe agonies.

Once Sultan Nasiruddin is said to have visited Sheikh Farid on his way to Uch on pilgrimage. With him was Balban who later ascended the throne of Delhi. Balban wished to donate a village

to Sheikh Farid to relieve him of his pecuniary anxieties. The saint who believed in simple living declined the offer.

He would not have more than one blanket for himself. During the day he sat on it, in the night the blanket was used as a cover-sheet and if he had to go out, he wrapped himself in it.

During his stay in Delhi, it was Farid's duty to arrange for the ablutions of his master Hazrat Qutb-ud-Din. Early one morning when he got up, he found that the fire in the hermitage had gone out. The winter was severe and he must have hot water for the master's ablutions. He hurried to the town to look for fire. Everybody was asleep. At last, he spotted a light in a house. He knocked. It was the house of a dancing girl. A glimpse and she fell in love with Farid. But he was in a frightful hurry; he must get back lest he got late for his master's prayers. The dancing girl would not listen; she must have something in return for the fire she was parting with. "I can pay any price", said Farid. "Then leave one of your charming eyes with me," the dancing girl decided to ask for the impossible. Hardly had she stopped speaking when Farid is said to have plucked one of his eyes and offered it to the dancing girl!

Farid was one of the leading protagonists of the Sufi cult in northern India. Sufism was a parallel movement in Islam. The Sufis "attached an esoteric significance to the teachings of the Quran" and regarded inward light as far more important than dogmatic formalism. They led ascetic lives and practised self-discipline. They developed loving devotion to God with an element of ecstasy. They believed "All is in God." They preached annihilation of self and ultimate union with the Almighty. They accepted the soul as distinguished from the human body. The orthodox Muslims called them heretics.

Baba Farid laid stress on love of man as a means of attaining love of God. Service of humanity was part of mystic discipline for him:

> Don't say a harsh word; God dwells in all men.
> Don't break a heart; every jewel is priceless.

A great poet of his time, Farid wrote his verse in musical measures so that it could be sung. Music was taboo in Islam but the Sufis were lovers of God and as such they considered themselves to be on a different plane.

Sheikh Nizamuddin Auliya of Delhi was Sheikh Farid's most prominent follower and a renowned Sufi himself. At the age of 90, Baba Farid sent for Hazrat Nizamuddin and taking leave of him, breathed his last.

It was a lucky coincidence that Guru Nanak met Sheikh Ibrahim, a follower of Baba Farid in the sixteenth century and recorded Baba Farid's poetry which was later on preserved in the *Holy Granth.*

Farid wrote a large number of couplets (*slokas*) which are very popular with Punjabi-speaking people. They are noted for their musicality and sweet cadence of diction:

Says Farid,
I have seen the eyes that lured the world.
A trace of kohl they would not bear.
And birds, today, have made their nests in them.

Says Farid,
Why do you roam the jungles with thorns pricking your feet?
Your Lord dwells in your heart.
And you wander about in search of Him.

Says Farid,
I thought I was alone who suffered.
I went on top of the house,
And found every house on fire.

KSD

Owing partly to the distance of time between Sheikh Farid and Guru Nanak and partly to the influence of eastern Punjabi expressions in Sheikh Farid's verses as found in the *Guru Granth*, it is sometimes doubted if they are actually Sheikh Farid's compositions. Some scholars have explicitly attributed them to a contemporary of Guru Nanak, Sheikh Ibrahim, who was the religious head at Pakpatan at that time. These attributions are difficult to accept. Firstly, the Sikh Gurus, both Nanak and Arjan, were too discriminating scholars of the lore of their time to have been deceived into believing the compositions of a contemporary to be those of his illustrious predecessor of three hundred years earlier. Secondly, there are references in these verses to some events of the times and austerities undergone by the first Sheikh Farid. A much later descendant of his would not arrogate those austerities to himself. Thirdly, Guru Arjan who compiled the *Guru*

Granth is not known to have accorded the honour of inclusion in the scripture of his religion the compositions of any contemporary of local importance only. Even a famous mystic of the time, Shah Hussain, was not accorded that honour.

It is sometimes argued that since the modern Indian languages began to take shape in the eighth or ninth century and that literary traditions remained strongly conservative and were reflected primarily through *Apabhramsha* up to the 11th century, it is difficult to accept that the Multani dialect could have attained in the 12th century such literary refinement as is evidenced in Sheikh Farid's verses. Also they are so similar in their style and diction to the compositions of Guru Nanak and even Guru Arjan that it becomes hard to believe that there is a distance of some three hundred years between the two. If we proceed on the basis of this argument of chronic change, the language of Sheikh Farid's verses is not much different from refined Multani speech extant even today after a lapse of four centuries. And there is no reason to believe that the rate of change was quicker in the earlier period.

There can be no doubt about Sheikh Farid's deep learning. His available compositions, though written in a dialect, amply suggest a learned mind behind the sensitive idiom, a mind that has steeped itself in the tradition of his age and creed and is capable of absorbing the influences of his environment.

However, a feature of Sheikh Farid's compositions available in the *Guru Granth* is that they do not seem to be the work of a religious missionary of Islam who is known to have enjoyed great esteem in high circles both religious and temporal and to have converted large numbers of people to Islam. These compositions have very little of the spirit of Islamic *Shara*, use very little of Islamic religious lore and do not show any marked sectarian trend. From the nature of the contents, they seem to be the work of a Muslim who though deeply religious had very little to do with Islamic lore. On the other hand, he is keenly aware with the transitory nature of this world as per the Hindu belief. It is surprising indeed that nowhere in these verses does the name of the Muslim Prophet Mohammed ever occur, nor do his titles of Nabi, Rasul, Paigambar, etc. Even the word 'Murshid', a popular concept of Sufi tradition, is not to be found. The general temper is devotional, no doubt, and great stress is laid upon the performance of prayers, fasting and other ways of worship according to Islam. The spirit is, nevertheless,

of Hindu *bhakti*. Even the words Guru and Prabhu occur in one of the hymns.

Like most religious and metaphysical writing, Sheikh Farid's poetry has for its general content, man's love of God. Such poetry has naturally to be lyrical and sentimental and its imagery erotic.

In Sheikh Farid the relationship between God and man is that of husband and wife. In the very first three of his couplets found in the *Guru Granth* he visualises the relationship between man and God first as that between man and death and then gives it the conjugal parallel. The day woman was born, he says, the hour of dedication to the husband was fixed. Death, the bridegroom, heard of for long, comes and shows himself at the appointed hour. The helpless soul is beaten out of the bones. Death, the bridegroom, must take away in marriage the soul, the bride. Let the soul understand this that the appointed hour cannot be evaded.

There is very little difference between God and the Angel of Death in Sheikh Farid's imagery. In another couplet he says:

Had I known the sesame seeds were so small in quantity
I should have been liberal in filling my fist.
Had I known my Lord was not yet an adult,
I would have prided less in myself.

In yet another verse, he says again:

Had I known the end would slip,
Tighter would I have made the knot.
Nobody matters to me as much as You,
Though I have traversed a whole world.

This world indeed appears to Sheikh Farid to be an obstacle in the way of man's union with God. He says:

The lanes are muddy and far is the house
of the One I love so much.
If I walk to Him I wet my rug, and
remaining behind, I fail in my love!

Life in this world is a period of separation from God, which is full of sorrow and pain:

Sorrow is the bedstead,
Pain the fibre with which it is woven,
And separation is the quilt
See this is the life we lead, O Lord.

Absorption in the affairs of the world, in forgetfulness of God, is regarded by Sheikh Farid as desertion by a woman of her husband and going over to an alien house.

Give it not me, Oh Lord, that I should
seek alien shelter.
If that is what You have willed,
Rather take the life out of this body.

Man's duty in this life is to win the love of God as it is the woman's to win the love of her husband, and as such, youth or age should not matter;

Those who have not wooed Him when their hair was dark,
May do so when their hair is grey.
For if you love the Lord
The newness of youth will be yours again.

The metaphors of wooing the husband and being accepted by him or failing in being accepted have been used in many other verses also:

I did not sleep with my love tonight
And every bit of my body aches.
Go ask the deserted ones,
How they pass their nights.

I am not afraid of the passing of my youth,
If the love of my Lord does not pass with it.
So many youths have withered away without love.

The fear of death is perhaps a more forceful emotion in Sheikh Farid's poetry and he has expressed it in touching figures of speech. As mentioned before, the main image is that of death as the bridegroom and the human soul as the bride, and subordinate figures, the reduction of the body to dust, the greying of the hair, the trembling of the limbs and drying away of the bones have been used to reinforce the argument. The motif of rich and poor being brought to the same end has also been used quite often, too.

The impermanence of life on this earth has been illustrated by the figure of a bird coming to play on the bank of a pool. In some verses man has been instructed how to behave in this transitory world. He is advised to live humbly and poorly and remain ever conscious of his sins.

Like most men of renunciation, Sheikh Farid regards detachment from this world as the right path for man. A true fakir has been pictured by him thus:

On the bank of a pool in the moor
The swan has come to alight
But he does not dip his beak to drink,
He is eager to fly away.

The teachings of Sheikh Farid as embodied in these verses do not indeed smack at all of any superior attitude. He comes down to the level of the poorest of the poor and calls himself a sinner. This attitude of his endeared him to the conquered people. It is this fact of endearment which is responsible, perhaps, for the inclusion of his poetry in the Scripture of the Sikh Gurus who were in their time and in their own way endeavouring to uplift their people and to give them the strength to stand up to oppression.

There is nothing in Sheikh Farid's poetry that is strident, or offensive to the sentiments of the Indian people. Unlike missionaries in general, he does not play up the superior virtues of his creed. Nowhere does he make any reference to the caste system, to idolatry or to other peculiar features of the Brahmanical creed or creeds. His verse is singularly free from any social, historical or sectarian prejudices. No doubt, in many of his verses he exhorts people to offer prayers in the Muslim way and to practise other obligations of the Muslim creed, but his teachings are of a general moral nature and have to be judged as such. His message is for a typical feudal society; stressing detachment from the world, if not actual renunciation of it, to purge oneself of all ambition and passion, to be humble, poor, passive and contented. As such Farid must be credited with exercising a refining influence on the society of his day and keeping down the pressure of individual ambition and greed and of conflict. No other teaching was to be expected from a high-souled man like Sheikh Farid, especially when he happened to be on the winning side in the conflict between the two sets of forces.

Specimens of Farid's verse

My bread is made of wood and my hunger is my sauce
Those who eat rich meals shall come to grief.

Says Farid, you must fathom the ocean which contains what
you want

Why do you soil your hand searching the petty ponds;

Says Farid, the Creater is in the creation and the creation in the Creator
Whom shall we blame when He is everywhere?

SSS

Between Farid and Guru Nanak

A distance of over two centuries lies between Sheikh Farid and Guru Nanak. Very little of Punjabi literary activity that may have taken place during these two centuries is available. But then suddenly in Guru Nanak a great poet and thinker has emerged. One cannot help imagining that there had been prior to Guru Nanak a sufficiently mature literary tradition.

These two centuries were a period of storm and stress in North India when repeated waves of conquerors from across the western passes flooded the country and dynasties changed in rapid succession. Guru Nanak found himself caught in one of these floods of conquest and is reported to have been taken prisoner by Babar the Mughal, near Lahore, in 1521. His reactions to these events are faithfully presented by him in his immortal verse called *Babarvani.*

Of the literary activity during the two centuries before Guru Nanak—only a few relics are available. These are portions of ballads celebrating battles between local chiefs in the Punjab. That these were sufficiently popular and valued for their quality is evidenced by the various Gurus referring to them as directions for musical rendering of some of the compositions, called *vars* in the *Holy Granth.*

For instance, Guru Nanak's *var* in Asa Rag has in the beginning the direction that it is to be sung to the tune of the *var* of *Tunda As Raja.* Similarly, Guru Nanak's *var* in Majh Rag is to be sung to the tune of the *var* of Malik Murid and Chandrahara Sohia. Guru Arjan's *var* in Gauri Rag has similarly to be sung according to the tune of *var* of Rai Kamal Din Mauj Din, Guru Amar Das's *var* in Gujri Rag according to the *var* of Sikander Ibrahim, Guru Ram Das's *var* in Vadahans Rag to the tune of the *var* of Lalla Bahlima, Guru Amar Das's in Ramkali Rag to that of Jodha Verai Purabani; Guru Ram Das's *var* in Sarang Rag to the tune of Rai Mahma Hasna, Guru Nanak's *var* in Malhar Rag to the tune of Rana Kailash

and Maldev, Guru Ram Das's *var* in Kanara Rag to the tune of the *var* of Moosa.

The stories of these *vars* are available but the texts unfortunately are to be had only in parts.

Six of these *vars* are understood to be of the pre-Nanak period. The *var* of Kamal Din Mauj Din sings of a battle between two brothers, Rai Kamal Din and Rai Sarang. Mauj Din is Kamal Din's son and is mentioned as belonging to Talwandi, villages of which name are found in almost all the districts of Central Punjab. But the language of the *var* is that of West Punjab. The story of Tunda As Raja is more like the better-known legend of Puran, depicting the incestuous passion of a step mother for her grown-up step-son. As Raja is the son of Raja Sarang who has married in his advanced years a young wife. As Raja draws the passionate attention of his step mother. He resists her advances, for which he is falsely accused of doing exactly the contrary. Raja Sarang orders him to be taken to the jungle and killed. But the executioners, moved to mercy, cut off only his hands by way of proof of his execution, and leave him there to fend for himself. In the jungle As Raja is found by a washerman. Later by sheer accident, reminding one of the story of Oedipus in Greek, he becomes the ruler of a small principality. Some years later there is a cruel famine in the kingdom of Raja Sarang, which is invaded too by a rival chief, as Raja comes to his father's rescue. The truth is at last found out and the father and son are reconciled and As Raja is given the Tilak of a Yuvraj:

> Roars Sardul Rai like a tiger
> As the drums of war are beaten.
> The heroic Khans and Sultans thunder
> In the field of battle.
> Letters are written to the cripple As Raja,
> Offering him the kingdom.
> As Raja, victorious over all,
> Adorns the royal palace.

In the *var* of Sikander Ibrahim, Sultan Sikander a lustful feudal chief, had abducted the beautiful wife of a Brahmin. Ibrahim rescues the Brahmin's wife and restores her to her husband.

The *var* of Hansa Mahma relates the story of fighting between two Rajput chiefs, Hansa and Mahma, both of the Bhatti clan. Hansa has played some treacherous trick on Mahma, but is worsted

in battle. The *var* of Lalla Bahlima relates to a famine owing to drought, in the principality of Lalla, Bahlima gives him water from his own canal on the promise of one-sixth of the produce. Lalla refuses to meet the obligation and as a consequence fighting breaks out in which both sides suffer heavily. In the *var* of Moosa, woman is again the bone of contention. The betrothed of Moosa is married to another chief from whom Moosa wins back his bride after a fight.

The language as well as the style of these ballads is that of West Punjab, their common characteristics of a feudal society are illicit passion, famine, drought, help by a neighbour, breach of promise, treachery and clan rivalry.

It is a pity that the texts of these ballads are not available in full, but perhaps enough effort has not been made to look for them in the countryside, where they may still be available. The parts that are extant have enough indication, however, that the Punjabi language at the time was developed enough to sing of the people's passions before Guru Nanak came upon the scene and lifted the language and culture of the Punjab to a considerably higher level.

SSS

3

The Sikh Gurus and their Times

Guru Nanak (1469–1539)

If Sheikh Farid marks the beginning, and a glorious beginning it is, of Punjabi literature, Guru Nanak represents the highest point it has reached so far. Not because he is the first preceptor of the religion of the Sikhs who are to this day staunch champions of Punjabi literature, the excellence that Punjabi poetry has reached in the work of Guru Nanak is excellence in its own right, though it is available to us as an influential part of the canon of the *Guru Granth*, the holy scripture of the Sikhs.

Guru Nanak was born on 16 April 1469 that is the second of Baisakh, 1526 of the Vikrami era, in a village in those days called Talwandi Rai Boi in the province of Lahore. Since the days of the ascendancy of the Sikhs, it has been known as Nankana Sahib which is now a major town in the district of Sheikhupura in Pakistan. His father known as Kallian Rai alias Kalu was in the service of Rai Bular, the zamindar of the place. From his sobriquet of Mehta, it may be surmised that he was keeper of land-records for he has often been described as a *patwari*. As would be natural in the circumstances of such a petty official, the son, Nanak, received elementary instruction from both the village Brahmin and the village Qazi which is often described as worthless according to legend. But if we are to judge from the learning evidenced in Guru Nanak's poetry, it may have been quite substantial. Nanak is also described as engaging himself in tending cattle as a young boy in the early part of his life.

He was married in his early youth to the daughter of a Chona Khatri of Batala, from which one is tempted to believe that the real home of Nanak's father may have been some place in this

area. This assumption is strengthened by the fact that his brother-in-law Jai Ram, husband of his elder sister Nanaki, is described as an official at Sultanpur, the seat of the administrator of the Jalandhar Doab in those days. Daulat Khan, the administrator, is probably the same person named among those who invited Babar, the Mughal ruler of Kabul, to invade India, then under the incompetent Sultan of Delhi, Ibrahim Lodhi. Jai Ram is known to have managed for Nanak an appointment as a store-keeper, though above the age of thirty at that time and father of two sons, Nanak could not put his heart into his job. Instead he is believed to have received a mission from God to strive to save his people from spiritual degradation, an inevitable consequence of their sad political and social plight. He gave up his job and became a man of God. Even his name 'Nanak' may have been originally an epithet given by the people as the possessor of divine knowledge and a popular variation upon the Buddhist term, Gnanakaya or its simpler form Gnanak.

The next thirty years or so Nanak spent as a wandering fakir renouncing the life of a householder. It is only towards the end of his life that Nanak, now widely known as Guru, settled at Kartarpur on the bank of the Ravi which is now a lone Indian habitation in the midst of Muslim villages belonging to Pakistan. There he passed away in 1539 at the age of about seventy, having established his own distinctive creed which came later to be known as Sikh Dharma.

As is the rule in the *Guru Granth*, Guru Nanak's compositions are set forth in the different Ragas, in each of which there is a further five-fold division. First, there are the common *padas* (stanzas); then the *ashtapadis* (eight-stanza compositions). In the third place come the longer hymns under different names, mostly folk-song forms, like *chhant*, *birhara*, *pahare*, *solhe* and *savayya*. These are followed by longer *vanis* or compositions. Last of all come the *vars*. Then there are some sections outside the Raga-division, the *Japu* at the commencement, the *Sahiskriti slokas*, and the miscellaneous *slokas* at the end. These divisions correspond roughly to the temper of the composition. *Padas* etc. are by and large, lyrical, *vars* are philosophical observations, combining social criticism, and the longer compositions are mainly philosophical. In this class fall the *Japu*, the *Sidh Ghoshti* and *Onkar*. Guru Nanak's *vars* are in Ragas Magh, Asa and Malhar.

Guru Nanak's poetry could also be classified from the aspects of language; Apabhramsha, Hindvi and Punjabi. These compositions offer an instructive study in the development of language in that period.

Guru Nanak's compositions have a very definite metrical structure, but he indulges in so many variations that superficial students are often tempted to remark that they follow no clear pattern whether in Apabhramsha, Hindvi or Punjabi. The expression is classical, chaste and well thought-out. And yet an impression of spontaneity is given. It is possible that when these compositions were collected and incorporated in the *Guru Granth*, a well-established system of transcription was observed and a classical style imposed. It may be observed that in none of the three variations mentioned above is there any consistent purity of linguistic forms. In the so-called Punjabi, Hindvi prepositions, conjunctions and sometimes even verbs may be found. Similarly, the Apabhramsha and the Hindvi compositions are rather freely interspersed with Punjabi expressions. This is evidently a phenomenon of the evolution of literary style as well as of the spoken language in that period.

The content of Guru Nanak's poetry is of course religious in purpose and accordingly lacks variety of themes. But that is perhaps the limitation of all devotional poetry. Still in the hands of a genius like Nanak, this devotion can become individual and personal as in any secular lyrical poetry, for even the divine can be realised, if at all, in an intensely personal idiom only. Thus at many places Guru Nanak seems to address not a general formless and all-pervading divinity but the human beloved, husband or young wife. Religious poetry in India from the oldest times has been noted for its eroticism, very much like our painting and sculpture. The *Bhakti* tradition in the Middle Ages of which the Sikh tradition is in some ways a continuation, has consciously toned down the erotic. A strong moral censorship is seen at work so that erotic feelings are disciplined into conjugal warmth.

But in the greater part of Guru Nanak's verse, lyricism is found combined with philosophy, as is indeed the general character of major poetry. Guru Nanak's philosophy is a remarkable mixture of Upanishadic idealism and empirical realism. Sometimes, like most religious thinkers, Guru Nanak turns mystic, too. But if there is a mysticism in Guru Nanak, it is of an unconventional variety.

For he does not ever claim to have realised the divine in any ultrarational way. The Divine is a mystery to him and he strives to pierce it with the help of his intellect, till he seems to have reached its borders. There he finds himself baffled and falls back on the Divine in the human. Ultimately, it turns out to be his own universal sympathy and all-pervading feeling of goodwill towards humanity which he realises as his God.

Guru Nanak's *Japu* is regarded as the most important work of the Sikh religious doctrine. It is a long poem of thirty-eight stanzas of unequal length and composed in a style that is lyrical, and esoteric in turn. An attempt has been made in it to break through the limits of the prevalent modes of thought both Hindu and Islamic. This attempt is successful as far as it goes, that is, in refuting all the older hypotheses and beliefs regarding the Ultimate Reality. Beyond this it is the reader's intuition that can help him imbibe the message.

According to one school of thought among Sikh scholars, the *Japu* is a description of the *Sadhana* or effort that man has to make in order to realise the Ultimate Reality. But in actual practice it has come to be a rather mystical incantation for the common reader and extremely erudite document for the scholar. (For more detailed discussion see—Guru Nanak's masterpiece that follows.)

The *Siddha Goshti* is a polemic against the religious and ascetic practices of the Siddhas, the followers of the famous Gorakh Nath.

In his third long poem, *Omkar*, there is a similar debate with the Brahmins. In both these long poems great emphasis is laid on meditation, what Guru Nanak calls 'Nam Simran'.

Next in importance to the *Japu* in Sikh litany is Guru Nanak's *var* in Rag Asa. It is a composition of twenty-four core stanzas which present its metaphysical and cosmogonic thesis. Around it are clustered sixty couplets and longer hymns of which eleven are composed by Guru Angad, Guru Nanak's immediate successor in the line of the Gurus. These verses have a distinctly critical, social intent. No doubt, they also reinforce the metaphysical meaning in the core stanzas. But at places they suddenly become charged with a rather revolutionary social content. Some of them have a shattering political tone:

> Sin is the king and greed the minister
> and falsehood the revenue collector.
> Lust is the assistant who is consulted
> when counsel is taken.

The people devoid of knowledge are blind,
dead bodies filled with ash.

Criticising the common run of Brahmin priests, Guru Nanak says:

The Gurus dance and disciples beat drums,
They move their feet and sway their heads.
Dust rises and falls into their hair.
The people looking at them laugh and
go back to their homes,
All this is a show for self-preservation,
For which they throw themselves on the ground.

Guru Nanak is essentially an iconoclast and he breaks icons in all temples. For instance he condemns the caste system, idol worship and various other forms of the Brahmanical religion. He ridicules the ritual and superstitions that had come to prevail in Hindu society in connection with birth, marriage, death and other events in life. He speaks cavalierly about Muslim formalism of prayer, fasting and burial, pilgrimages to shrines, Hindu and Muslim alike, he regards as futile and hypocritical.

On the social scale, he declares himself to be on the side of the lowliest. He proclaims:

Lowly among the lowliest, the lowliest of all,
Nanak is with them, and does not envy the big.

Similarly, he has many a kind word to say about women, victims of oppression, denigration as well as ravishment in the feudal society:

By woman is one conceived, of women born,
to women pledged and married.
When woman is dead, another is sought,
From woman starts the household discipline.
How can that be decried who gives birth to nobility?

The Muslim also does not escape his censure. For instance, he demolishes the Muslim belief that on the day of judgement, the dead will rise from their graves to take their reward of pleasure or pain:

The body of the Musalman is turned into earth
Then kneaded by the potter,

Who makes pots and bricks out of it,
When burning in fire it cries
Vehemently and helplessly as sparks and embers
fall away from it.

Unlike religious men of different faiths, as a rule, Guru Nanak takes note of oppression and exploitation of his people by an invading army in poetry of intense pain and bitterness. Indeed, this is something unique in the religious consciousness of his age. He indicts the invasion and conquest of India by Babar in more than one composition:

They conquered Khurasan and subdued Hindustan,
The Creator does not blame Himself for it.
When the people were being thus oppressed
Did it not hurt you, O Lord?
Thou art the self-same Creator of all;
If the mighty inflict injury upon the mighty
It need not be resented,
But if the prurient lion falls upon the herd of cows
The herdsman must be blamed for it.

In another composition he refers to Babar's invasion in words such as these:

He has come down from Kabul at the head of a
procession of evil,
And demands gifts by force
Law and grace have both hidden themselves and
falsehood reigns supreme.

He is still more bitter and sore over the humiliation of his country's women and laments:

Those with richly coiffered hair, and *sindhoor* filled
in the parting line,
Have had their heads shorn with scissors,
And as they walk dust rises to choke their throats,
Those who were the beauties of palaces are not
permitted even to sit in the presence (of the oppressor.)
When newly married brides, escorted by their bridegrooms
They were brought home in palanquins inlaid with ivory,
Unctions poured over their heads and fans were swung,

Standing they were showered with costly gifts,
Sitting they received gifts equally expensive,
Eating prawns and coconuts, they adorned nuptial beds,
Today their pearl necklaces torn, there are ropes
around their necks.

He points out the futility of charms, spells and the like against this oppression:

When news was received of Babar's attack
Countless holy men read spells to check him.
Mansions, mosques and temples were burnt,
And their princely denizens thrown into wails and laments.
But no Mughal ever turned blind; nobody's charms availed.

While in such contexts the imagery employed is poignantly evocative in his verse of moral tenor, Nanak draws images from the working life of a peasant or shopkeeper as it may be:

Make good deeds your soil and the word your seed,
and irrigate it with the water of truth
Cultivate the crop of honesty, then you will know
What is heaven and what is hell.

While the longer compositions mentioned above are more or less erudite in tone and content, they are at places quite lyrical too. In compositions of a social trend like *Var Asa*, the lyricism is more pronounced, paeans of praise and glory are sung to God and the Guru and when the content shifts to facts of social life, the lyricism becomes more pictorial. The pathos and irrationality of social life are brought out in a surprisingly sensuous and passionate tone.

In the third category can be placed those compositions that portray the relations between God and man and between the Guru and his devotee in terms of human situations of which the most representative is the relation between man and wife, God being the husband. The description takes on a beautifully and passionately human tone so that the divine situation is altogether submerged in the human situation:

The peacock's cries resound in the air, O sister,
It is the advent of the month of Savan.
O young inebriate, your eyes, as coils entangle
Those who long for love.

You perform such varied toilettes, O inebriate!
But your Lord is taken up with others.
He came in my dream and went away
and my eyes were filled with tears.
Come again, O sleep of good fortune,
That I may see my beloved in dream.
I cannot come to you, my love,
nor can I send someone else with a message
I will cut off my head to make a seat for you,
and serve you headless.
Why may not I die, give up my life
when my love has become alien to me?

Indeed Guru Nanak's genius ranges widely over a vast field of human relations as well as it keeps itself fixed to the divine as the pole star.

SSS

Specimens of his verse

Kaliyuga is a dagger,
Kings are butchers,
Dharma has taken wings and disappeared.
In the black night of falsehood
The moon of truth is nowhere to be seen.
I am lost in the search,
I find no way out of the darkness.
Afflicted with the ego, I wail in sorrow.
Says Nanak, how do I attain deliverance?

He was there in the beginning
And before the beginning
He is there today
He will be there hereafter.
He is the true Lord
His Name is true.
His language is endless love.
They ask and ask and ask
The giver always gives.
What should I offer
To behold His court?

What prayer should I make
Hearing which He should take kindly to me?
In the ambrosial hour of the morning
Remember and adore Him.

Man! You should love God the way the lotus loves water.
It's knocked down by waves and yet it blossoms and
continues to love.
Born out of water, it dies without water.
Man! How can you be saved without love?
God lives within you and blesses you with the gift of devotion.
Man! You should love God the way fish loves water;
The more the water the happier she is in her heart and soul.
She lives not a moment without water,
God alone knows the agony of her heart.

I saw Him in dream and he disappeared.
I cry, my eyes swimming in tears.
Lord! I cannot come to You.
Nor can I send anyone.
Come fair sleep, may be I see my Master again!
Says Nanak, what should I offer him
Who comes and gives me tidings of my Lord?
I offer him my beheaded head for seat
And I serve him without my head.
Why should not one die and lay down one's life
If one's Lord is found estranged?

My Lord God has come to my bed
I am at peace now.
With the Guru's grace I have found my love
And I enjoy Him to my heart's content.
The bride is fortunate
Her head is held high in pride.
Meeting the Lord is true union.
This is what Nanak longs for.

KSD

Guru Nanak's Masterpiece

The *Japji* is one of the finest compositions in the literature of the world. Had Guru Nanak not been the evolved soul that he was, he

would even then have ranked amongst the greatest men of the world on account of his authorship of this work alone.

Guru Nanak's times (1469–1539), though not far removed from us were quite different from ours. Every sage who set out to propagate his message in those days had to be a poet. Poetry has always been a powerful medium of communication. Guru Nanak chose the language of his people. This language was unfortunately not adequately developed; but unlike any other poet in Punjabi, Guru Nanak travelled far and wide, every inch of the Punjab which helped him enrich the language with the vocabulary of the various dialects. In Guru Nanak's works, one hears echoes of all the varieties of the Punjabi language. In addition, he was extremely liberal in borrowing from Sanskrit, Persian and Arabic. Guru Nanak indulged in long arguments with saints of his time in various parts of the country including the distant Himalayas but he never seems to have been handicapped by language. The *bhaktas* of the day appear to have evolved a lingua franca of their own. Their faith and their mission seem to have dictated a language which had a widely accepted vocabulary.

According to Mehrban, one of his three early biographers, the *Japji* was uttered after Guru Nanak's communion with God when he disappeared in the river Bain at Sultanpur. This appears at best to be a conjecture, as most of Mehrban's account of Guru Nanak's life evidently is. Mehrban made an attempt to reconstruct the story of Guru Nanak's life based upon his *Bani*. He naturally gave the *Japji* the premier place, uttered in God's own presence during Guru Nanak's first mystic experience. According to another source, a manuscript in the Punjab University Library at Lahore believed to have been written in mid-seventeenth century, the *Japji* was composed at Kartarpur after Lehna had joined Guru Nanak. While there is little evidence of the period of its composition, considering the maturity and sweep of thought and the consummate skill with which it is constructed, the *Japji* appears to have been written during the later part of Guru Nanak's time, most probably after he had settled down at Kartarpur.

While Guru Nanak conformed to the traditional pattern with an invocation to God in the beginning and a summing-up in the form of an epilogue at the end, there is evidence of a great deal of ingenuity and poetic skill in the body of the composition. Guru Nanak as a poet never cared for rigidity of poetic forms. Like the

moderns, he varied his metres and rhymes according to the flow of his thought and the content of his message.

In the invocation, he describes God in vivid terms but with utmost economy of words. A clever craftsman, Guru Nanak employs negative images also to make his picture precise. He affirms the unity of God most emphatically:

There is one God.
He is the supreme truth.
He, the Creator,
Is without fear and without hate.
He, the omnipresent,
Pervades the universe.
He is not born.
Nor does He die to be born again.
By His grace shall you worship Him.

Guru Nanak attached the greatest importance to truth:

Truth above all
Above truth, truthful conduct.

God cannot be known by just thinking about Him. Nor can He be known by solemn silence, nor deep meditation. Fasting has its virtues but the thirst for truth cannot be quenched by it. God can't be reached by any other way. It is only the righteous path that leads man to God.

This is how the *Japji* opens after the formal invocation. The rest of the poem is an answer to a question posed by the poet in the first hymn:

How then shall the truth be known?
How the veil of false illusion be torn?

Guru Nanak goes on to provide the answer. Despite the limitations of poetry, the dissertation is highly lucid and cogent.

There are thirty-eight hymns in the *Japji*, exclusive of the invocation and the concluding *sloka*.

The first seven hymns suggest that in order to narrow down the gap between God and man created by *maya*, one must submit to the will of God. And having fashioned the way of life as ordained by Him, one should sing His praises. One becomes like him whom one emulates. But repeatedly Guru Nanak reminds us that without

the grace of God, we cannot accept His will or even sing His praises. By His grace alone are some saved and others doomed to die without it. Actions determine how we are born but it is His grace which secures for us salvation.

The next four hymns (8–11) are devoted to the virtue of listening to the Word of God. By listening to the Word, man becomes wise, saintly, courageous and contented. By listening to the Word, man conquers fear of death, and his sins and sorrows disappear. By listening to the Word, man learns truth, his mind is led to meditation and there is no need to go on pilgrimages.

Another set of four hymns (12–15) dwells on those who, having listened to His word, believe in God. Guru Nanak says that the bliss of the believer is indescribable. The believer gains knowledge of all the spheres. He understands the ways of God, attains salvation and also saves his kith and kin.

In the following four hymns (16–19), Guru Nanak says that the believers become the leaders of men and are honoured in the eyes of God. But it is difficult to follow the mysteries of the divine; the more one goes into them, the deeper they tend to become. There are countless men who pray and adore God, and those who worship Him and undergo penance. Similarly, there are countless fools and thieves and frauds. Man has no power to give praise to God. It is His wish that prevails.

Some of the more important observations in the next eight hymns (20–27) are:

As soiled garments are washed with soap, the soul dirtied with sin is cleaned with prayer.

It is our actions and not words that make us sinners or saints.

Pilgrimage, austerity, compassion and generosity are like a mustard seed compared with the virtues of one who listens to, believes in and cherishes the Word of God.

Nobody knows when the world was created, neither the *pandit*, nor the *qazi*, nor the *yogi*, only He who made it can tell.

God alone can measure His greatness; he who would know His height must be as tall as He.

He is the king of kings who is granted grace and power to praise.

It is difficult to say how priceless God is, those who know Him are mute with adoration.

The next four hymns (28–31) are a salutation to the primal and pure God, who has no beginning and no end. He has a unique form which endures forever.

The following three hymns (32–34) maintain that it is the grace of God that fulfils one. He has the pride of power, God is true and dispenses truth.

The last four hymns (35–38) describe the various stages before man achieves union with God. The first is the realm of just and truthful living and correct behaviour. Then man attains the realm of knowledge, where reason is supreme. In the realm of action that follows, nothing but effort prevails. The highest is the realm of God, the truth which is gained only by His grace and blessings.

The summing-up asserts that not only the toils of those who worship God end, but they also set others free:

Air, water, and earth,
Of these are we made.
Air like the Guru's Word gives breath of life
To the babe born to the great mother earth.
Sired by the waters
The day and night our nurses be,
That watch us in our infancy.
In their laps we play,
The world is our playground,
Our acts right and wrong at Thy court
shall come to judgement:
Some be seated near Thy seat, some ever kept distant.
The toils have ended of those that have worshipped Thee,
O Nanak, their faces are lit with joyful radiance—
many others they have set free.

(Translation: Khushwant Singh)

The composition is most appropriately titled *Japji* since it emphasises the repetition of the name of God. His adoration is the only remedy to bridge the gap created between man and the Divine force by falsehood. The prayer endears one to God. His love earns one bliss which is the supreme fulfilment.

KSD

Guru Angad Dev (1504–1552)

Guru Angad Dev who succeeded Guru Nanak was not one of his sons. He was a disciple who qualified by dint of his devotion and spiritual evolvement to succeed the founder of the Sikh faith. Ascending the *gadi* in 1539 he did not have much time at his disposal to pursue creative activity. In less than 13 years that he led the Sikh community, he had a life of Guru Nanak written which has come to us as *Bhai Bale Wali Janam Sakhi* though, inevitably, in a somewhat distorted form. His main contribution, however, is perfecting the 35 letters of the Gurmukhi script and promoting their use amongst his people. He was fond of children and gave a great deal of attention to their education and well-being. He organised wrestling and other competitions for children and is said to have prepared a primer for teaching Gurmukhi.

He compiled Guru Nanak's *bani*, as much of it as he could collect and had its copies made for the devout.

As for himself, he has just 61 *slokas* said to have been composed by him and included in the *Holy Granth*. His idiom and diction remain the same as of Guru Nanak.

Specimens of his verse

Seeing without eyes,
Hearing without ears,
Walking without feet,
Working without hands,
Uttering His Name without tongue,
And dying while living,
Says Nanak, meeting the Master
Is accepting His will.

Those who fear Him, they fear none.
Those who fear Him not, they are afraid of everyone.
Says Nanak, this truth is known
Only when one enters His court.
He who walks, meets one who is walking.
He who flies, meets those who fly.
He who is living, lives with those who are alive.
He who is dead, remains with the dead.
Says Nanak, praise be to Him
Who has created the Universe.

Everyone has someone
This humble one has none but You.
Why shouldn't I die crying
When I can't remember You?
I remember You in pleasure
I remember You in pain
Says Nanak, O wise one!
This is how you meet the Master.

It's the rainy season, O my playmate!
And I long for my Lord.
Says Nanak, dies pining
The accursed one who loves other than her Master.
It's the rainy season, O my playmate!
It pours and pours
Says Nanak, she sleeps in peace
The blessed one who loves her Lord.

KSD

Guru Amar Das (1479–1574)

Guru Amar Das, born in Basarke near Amritsar, grew up in a Hindu home, with strong attachment to old Brahmanical ritual and religious practices like keeping fasts, worshipping idols and going on pilgrimages to major Hindu shrines like Hardwar and Varanasi. It was at quite an advanced age that he adopted the Sikh way of belief and worship, through a daughter-in-law in the family, who was the daughter of the second Sikh Guru Angad. As the tradition goes, the young woman used to recite Guru Nanak's hymns early in the morning when she churned curdled milk and did other family chores. Hearing some of these hymns, Amar Das was so deeply moved that he went to see Guru Angad at Goindwal and became a devoted Sikh. On the death of Guru Angad in A.D. 1552 he succeeded him as Guru. Again influenced by the practice of his predecessors, he started composing his own hymns of which some 901 compositions are found in the *Guru Granth.*

But the style of his hymnology is markedly different from that of Guru Nanak. While Guru Nanak was iconoclastic and original in his concepts, Guru Amar Das is more devotional in the way of *bhakti.* Possibly responding to the rather irregular composition and rhythm of the folk-songs, as found even in those days in the Dhola

songs of the country west of Lahore, some of his lines trail more rhythmic units than others. His diction also is less inclined towards the traditional Sadhu Bhakha. Of his longer compositions, the more famous are *Anand*, a Patti or acrostic (in which the stanzas begin each with a letter of the alphabet in succession), both placed in the *Guru Granth* under Raga Ramakali, and four *vars* in the Ragas Gujri, Suhi, Ramkali and Maru. The *Anand* occupies a special place of pride in Sikh ritual, being recited or sung at the end of every sacrament. In the tradition of Guru Nanak, he has condemned many Hindu customs like idol worship, fasting and the burning of widows on their husbands' funeral pyres.

The more poetic achievement of Guru Amar Das lies in his lyricising, with great effect, the ideas generally preached by Guru Nanak. He has used mostly the same imagery as used by Guru Nanak, that is, the imagery of wedded life, in singing of man's relationship with God, a peasant and petty trader in connection with the moral and social duties of life and of the commonly noted events in nature, its changes of climate like the onset of the rainy season and the advent of spring in framing his emotions. The sensuous quality in his verse is less pronounced, we may assume, because he composed poetry at an advanced age when he became the third Guru. His language has also a more prominent idiom of Central Punjab.

Guru Amar Das lays great stress on the institution of the Guru whose Word or *Gurbani* has, according to him, divine inspiration behind it. One way in which he stresses the authenticity of the Guru is by decrying and condemning the worship of any other deity or preceptor and the denigration of all other beliefs than those preached by Guru Nanak.

Guru Amar Das introduced the commonalty of eating in Sikh congregations, in the form of the common kitchen. Everybody, rich or poor, high or low in the caste hierarchy, was commended, when he came to see the Guru or to attend a communal gathering, to eat by seating himself on the floor in a row with other devotees. It is said that even the Emperor Akbar, when he came once to see the Guru was pleased to eat in this manner.

The worship of the Guru is termed service by Guru Amar Das, for which the devotee is promised all worldly and spiritual comforts.

SSS

Specimens of his verse:

If one were to look for the hour
At what hour should one say one's prayers?
Remembering him day and night
You become truthful and get to know the True One.
If the lover is forgotten for a moment,
No prayer avails.
With mind and heart devoted to Him in earnest
Not a breath goes waste.
Man! Meditate on Him,
True prayer is possible only
If God dwells in one's heart.

Listen, O cupid-smitten maiden!
Why do you flaunt yourself the way you do?
You haven't cultivated your own spouse,
With what face will you go to Him?
Those who know their Master
I bow before them.
I would like to be like them,
Meeting them in the company of godmen.
O you thoughtless one! Lost in falsehood and untruth
The truly charming Lord one finds alone with the
wisdom of the Guru.

Maya is like the snake
It has ensnared the world.
He who serves her
She bites him in return.
The holy one knows the antidote,
He cleans the dirt sticking to the feet thoroughly.
Says Nanak, only they are evolved
Who remain devoted to truth.

I sin a lot, there is no end to my misdeeds.
God! Save me with Your grace, I am a great sinner.
God! According my *karma*, my turn will never come.
It must be Your grace that can lead me to You.
The kind Guru led me to God
Washing all my sins and evil deeds away.
Those who remember God—
Says Nanak, they are honoured.

KSD

Guru Ram Das (1534–1581)

Guru Ram Das was one of the several followers of Guru Amar Das who came to Goindwal to pay his homage and never returned. He served the Guru with such devotion that Guru Amar Das chose him as spouse for his daughter Bibi Bhani and, when his end came made him his successor who thereupon assumed the name of Guru Ram Das.

Guru Ram Das followed his father-in-law in the practice of composing hymns also. The veneer of Guru Ram Das's hymns, both in flavour and content, is so similar to that of Guru Amar Das that the two together are quite distinct in their diction and style, from both Guru Nanak and Guru Arjan.

The distinctive mark of Guru Ram Das's poetry is his passionately devotional tone and his attitude towards Guru Amar Das. Though he uses the word Guru alone for him, the emotion is so personal that one cannot help marking a transformation of the beloved wife into the beloved Guru, for by all accounts Bibi Bhani his wife was for her spiritual life and personal qualities a replica of her father. The passion of this emotion is specially marked in hymns called *chhants*. One of the *chhants* begins with the lines:

> Daily I stand with my eye on the road
> Like a young girl intoxicated with youth.

Another *chhant* similarly begins with the lines:

> My eyes are possessed by my beloved,
> My dear, as the chatrik (rain bird) with the drops of rain.

Guru Ram Das uses the musical devices of alliteration, repetition, variation and counterpoint so profusely that it is sheer delight to recite his hymns. No wonder, the wedding, according to the Sikh rituals, is solemnised with singing and recitation of Guru Ram Das's *chhants*, in which he portrays in metaphysical diction the union of the bride and the bridegroom.

Similarly, delightful to recite are some of his verses in which he varies the length of lines with the apposition of phrases and words to the main phrase, so that a line may trail happily to twice or even thrice its metrically fixed length.

Altogether it is delightful as well as edifying to read and study Guru Ram Das purely as a poet.

Guru Ram Das makes frequent references to his elevation to

the status of Guru from the position of a poor vendor of boiled gram and other snacks, through the grace of Guru Amar Das:

I was an insect, trampled under people's feet,
for whom nobody cared.
The true Guru appointed me his peer and equal.

I am an insect who sought refuge with the Guru
who through his grace gave me light of the name.
SSS

Specimens of his verse

The Pandit reeds the Shastras and the Smritis
The Yogi shouts—Gorakh! Gorakh!
I am unlettered, I repeat the Name of God.
I know not what's in store for me.
I repeat the Name of God
To swim across the ocean of life.
The ascetic besmears himself with ashes,
The celibate has little to do with women.
I am unlettered, God is my only hope.
The Kshatriya wins laurels with his exploits,
The Shudra and the Vaishya serve others.
I am unlettered, God's Name alone can save me.
God! Yours is this creation,
You are everywhere.
Says Nanak, the devotee is glorified,
Eyeless that I am, God is my only support.

The mother likes to see her son eat,
The fish likes to swim in water,
The true Guru likes to feed the devotee.
Lord, give me the company of men of God
Meeting whom my sufferings end.
The way it pleases the cow to meet her calf,
The wife when her husband is at home,
The devotee is pleased when he sings God's praises.
The sarang likes when it rains,
The sovereign likes to see riches around him,
The man of God when he can repeat His Name.
The man of the world likes when he gathers wealth,

The Guru's Sikh likes when he meets God in an embrace.
Nanak likes it if he can kiss the feet of the man of God.

He who calls himself the Sikh of the Guru
He must get up early and meditate on Him.
He must be active in the morning
And should take a dip in the pool of nectar.
He must listen to the Guru's advice and remember God.
All his sins and misdeeds are thus washed away.
As day dawns, he should read scriptures
And repeat His Name every moment of the day.
The Guru likes the Sikhs who remember God with every
breath of their lives.

Lord! Pardon my past sins and show me the way.
I come to Your protection shedding my ego.
The man of God must remember God.
And remain in His protection for ever and ever
With single-minded devotion.
I have no status, I belong not to a high caste,
I have no home, no place to go to,
The Word has removed all my doubts,
The Guru himself has bestowed this upon me.
One who is avaricious dies in avarice,
He is lost in false promises
And is punished in the town of death.
Says Nanak, He is everywhere
There is none like Him.
He bestows the gift of devotion on men of God,
And the Guru's Sikhs are ever happy.

KSD

Guru Arjan Dev (1563–1606)

A considerable part of the *Gurubani* or poetry in the *Holy Granth* is the work of the fifth Sikh Guru, Guru Arjan Dev. But to Guru Arjan Dev also can be attributed the strengthening of the trend towards the use of Sadhavi Braj Bhasha, which is seen in a much less marked degree in the language of the first four Gurus. Born and brought up in the scholarly tradition of the Sikh establishment, as distinguished from the other Gurus, who had been simple peasants in the early part of their life, Guru Arjan was drawn more

and more to the scholarly and erudite tradition of the other religious centres in Hindu India. Even in one of his earliest compositions which is generally considered to have been a series of letters written by him to his father, Guru Ram Das, the language, though it had a more marked Punjabi tone, has come under the influence of Sadhavi Braj.

Guru Arjan Dev's compositions in the *Granth Sahib* can be divided into three main categories. One, long, organised poems called *Sukhamani* (Peace of Mind), and *Bavan Akhari* (Fifty-two Letters) and the *Bara Maha* (Twelve Months) in Rag Majh.

The first two are the most popular compositions of the Sikh liturgy. The *Sukhamani* comprises twenty-four sections each consisting of twenty-four eight-line stanzas preceded by one couplet each. Its language stands somewhere between modern Punjabi and old Braj or Sadhavi. Its greatest virtue is simplicity both of diction and of theme. Its main emphasis is on living a life of meditation and abstinence from all kinds of physical indulgence and mental perturbation. A considerable portion is devoted to the definition and description of a person of saintly life (*sant*) and possessor of divine knowledge (*Brahma Giani*). In another section, however, the writer undertakes a rather strongly-worded condemnation of persons inimical to and oppressive of saintly persons. The poem is rightly held in great esteem by men of learning as well as devotion. It is generally recited in part or whole in the morning in most Sikh temples and homes.

The *Bara Maha* is similarly recited in Sikh temples and homes, especially on the first of every month, for twelve of its thirteen stanzas are assigned to the months of the Hindu calendar while the last provides a general summing-up of the argument. Of all Guru Arjan's compositions, its language is nearest to Punjabi diction and idiom.

The title Bavan Akhri seems to suggest that its fifty-two stanzas are assigned to the fifty-two letters of the Devnagri alphabet. But actually the letters are those of the Gurmukhi alphabet and some of them are repeated, for the Gurmukhi alphabet consists of only thirty-five letters.

The second category, comprising eight of the twenty-two *vars* in the *Granth Sahib*, deals with the same subjects as are dealt with in the *vars* of the other Gurus, mostly Hindu cosmology and the moral build-up of man.

In the third category can be placed the miscellaneous types of composition which along with those composed by the other Gurus form the greater part of the entire canon of the *Granth Saheb.*

The general tone of Guru Arjan's writings is that of saintly devotion to the divine, sweet resignation to the divine will and simple but meaningful teaching of piety and virtuous living.

The situation in which the *Sukhamani* is composed is that of the Damocle's sword of the displeasure of the Mughal Emperor Jahangir, hanging on the Guru's head, while his traducers were constantly instigating the imperial authorities against him. This resulted in his being arrested, under Emperor Jahangir's orders, and being put to death after tortures that would be regarded as inhuman in any age or clime. The accusation was that he had helped and blessed Jahangir's rebel son Khusro, by putting a tilak or mark of saffron on his forehead when the unfortunate prince visited the Guru's place, Goindwal. There is no direct evidence of Guru Arjan Dev's involvement in the Khusro affair, though the final battle in which Khusro was defeated and captured was fought on the bank of the Beas, very near Guru Arjan Dev's abode in which peasant levies are known to have fought on Khusro's side. Interestingly Jahangir, in his memoirs, while referring to Guru Arjan Dev's arrest and execution on his personal orders, accuses the Guru of running a shop of untruth and misleading the common people among whom there was a considerable number of Muslims also.

As important of his own verse is the compilation of the *Holy Granth.* (A detailed study follows.)

SSS

Specimens of his verse

Depending upon Your indulgence
I whiled away my time in filial love.
I am an erring child,
You are the gracious parent.
It is easy to boast
But difficult to belong to You.
You are my pride, You are my power.
To You I come.
You are amidst us; You are outside us.
You depend upon none.
Father, I know not Your ways.

You are the deliverer of Your devotees.
You must protect me, my Lord.
With God's grace I found salvation,
A meeting with the Guru
Has led Nanak to know God.

Man! You must remember Him
Who rules supreme.
Man! You must remember Him
Who saves you in the hour of your peril.
Man! You must remember Him
Who satisfies every hunger of your heart.
Blessed are those who remember Him.
Their foes and all those who find fault with them are defeated.
Says Nanak, you must remember God, the Great God.
Everyone bows before him who remembers God.

You are my father,
You are my mother,
You are my relative,
And my brother.
You are my saviour everywhere.
I have neither worry nor fear.
Blessed by You, I come to know You.
You are my anchor,
You are my pride.
There is none other than You.
It's Your play, this world.
Everything living is Your creation.
You make them do what pleases You
Whatever happens is ordained by You.
None other has anything to do with it.
I gained the precious peace remembering Your Name.
Singing God's praises
I am contented at heart.
With the grace of the Guru,
I have succeeded in the perilous task.
I am at peace.
The Guru has brought me peace.
I am free from pain and sin.
Daily I repeat the Name of God.

All my ills have disappeared.
And I've gained salvation.
God's greatness is unfathomable.
It is in God's company that one finds deliverance.
I sing praises of the Blemishless every day,
My afflictions are gone and I am saved.
I remember God in word and thought,
Says Nanak, I am under his protection.

Where neither father nor mother
Neither friend nor brother
Can help you, God does.
Where the dreadful agent of death smothers you,
Only God's Name abides by you.
When you have an insurmountable difficulty,
Remember the Name of God for a moment.
No good deeds and ceremonials may save you,
God's Name alone washes a million sins.
O man of God! You must meditate on Him,
Says Nanak, this is how you'll find real peace.

I am wretched, stone-hearted, evil-minded, given to lust,
Master, save me howsoever You may!
You are all-powerful
You save them who seek Your protection,
You look after them.
Meditation, asceticism, discipline, cleanliness
and correct behaviour;
None of these can obtain salvation.
Says Nanak, with His grace He pulls one out
of the dark well.

There are three things in the tray
Truth, contentment and reason.
To this is added the nectar of God's Name
That sustains every living creature.
He who eats it, he who consumes it is saved.
It is a gift that can't be given up.
It must be remembered every moment.
The dark ocean of the world can be crossed by
clinging to His feet.
Says Nanak, God is present everywhere.

KSD

Guru Granth Saheb

The compilation of the *Holy Granth* came about due to an unfortunate family wrangle. Guru Angad who followed Guru Nanak was not his son. He was one of his disciples, who was considered fittest for the honour. Similarly Guru Amar Das, the third Guru, was also a devotee of Guru Angad and no blood relative as such. Accordingly when the time came to name his successor, Guru Amar Das decided in favour of Guru Ram Das in preference to his two sons, Mohan and Mohri.

While Guru Arjan, the fifth Sikh Guru, was the son of Guru Ram Das, he was not the eldest son, who expected to succeed his father. This put off his eldest brother Prithi Chand who started maligning Guru Arjan and styled himself as a Guru. It was learnt that Prithi Chand had started composing his own verses and passing them on to the Sikhs as the scripture. When Guru Arjan came to know of it, he decided to compile the text of the compositions of Guru Nanak and his successors in an authentic volume to insulate them against spurious interpolations.

In view of the importance of the task, Guru Arjan had a special cell set up in a quiet corner of Ramsar, one of the holy tanks in Amritsar. Bhai Gurdas, the eminent Sikh litterateur, was entrusted with the job of preparing the master-copy, Guru Arjan dictating the text himself. When the *Holy Granth* was ready, it was installed with due ceremony at the Harmandir and Bhai Budha, the oldest living disciple of Guru Nanak, appointed the first custodian. As a token of appreciation, Guru Arjan offered to include the compositions of Bhai Gurudas in the *Holy Granth*, but with the modesty of a scholar, he denied himself the great honour.

The *Holy Granth* was redictated by Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth and last living Sikh Guru, towards the close of his life when he had Guru Tegh Bahadur's compositions also incorporated in the body of the text. Again Guru Gobind Singh's greatness as a poet and his modesty did not allow him to include his own verse in it.

Guru Gobind Singh has a massive volume of compositions to his credit. Maybe the consideration that went against the inclusion of his own verse was that the compilation as done by Guru Arjan would get too unwieldy.

The hymns compiled in the *Holy Granth* have been arranged in various Ragas according to the system of Hindustani music. The

hymns under every musical measure are led by Guru Nanak and other Sikh Gurus in chronological order, the compositions of the Bhaktas following them. There are approximately 6,000 hymns in the *Holy Granth* in 31 Ragas.

It is said that Kahna, Chhajju, Pilu and a few other contemporary poets approached Guru Arjan and offered their verses for inclusion in the *Holy Granth*. The Guru duly considered their compositions but regretted his inability to include them in the volume for one reason or another.

Some of the bards who subscribed to the Sikh faith and composed several panegyrics in praise of the Sikh Gurus requested incorporation of their compositions. A few of these were accepted.

The scripting of the text was completed in 1604, Guru Arjan providing an epilogue:

> Three things are there in the vessel
> Truth, contentment and learning
> The ambrosial Name of God is added to it,
> The Name that is everybody's sustenance;
> He who repeats and enjoys it
> Shall be saved.
> One must not abandon this gift,
> It should ever remain dear to one's heart
> The dark ocean of the world
> Can be crossed by clinging to His feet
> Nanak, it is He who is everywhere.

This was followed by an apologia in utmost modesty:

> I can't measure Your grace
> You've made me worthy of You
> I am full of blemishes;
> I have no virtue
> You have been compassionate
> Compassionate You have been and kind,
> Thus I met the True Guru,
> Says Nanak, I live on the Name alone,
> It pleases my heart and soul.

The Ragmala following this does not tally with the Ragas in the *Holy Granth* and its inclusion continues to be a subject of controversy.

The text in the *Holy Granth* has utmost sanctity accorded to it since its compilation. No change of even a syllable was permitted. For a long time, the Sikhs would not permit the words in the text to be written or printed separately; they continued to be copied as a continuous text following the original done by Bhai Gurdas.

It is said, once Aurangzeb took exception to a particular verse in the *Holy Granth*. Ram Rai, the son of Guru Har Rai, the seventh Sikh Guru, who was staying with Aurangzeb as his guest, altered the original slightly to please the King. When it was reported to the Guru, he was mortified and sent word to his son never to show his face to him again!

Once Guru Har Rai was resting. A Sikh entered his room while reciting hymns from the *Holy Granth*. The moment the Guru heard him, he rose and sat upright in reverence to the Holy word.

The *Holy Granth* is the most ambitious compilation of devotional verse. It is also the most representative of its time. It has a grand design and a highly scientific manner of presentation. The pattern adopted by Guru Arjan was such as permitted incorporation of later compositions without interfering with the text of the works already compiled. Guru Gobind Singh did not have to disturb the arrangement while adding Guru Tegh Bahadur's composition to the compilation.

It opens with the 'mool mantra', the basic postulate:

There is but one God
His Name is Truth
He is the Creator
He fears none nor does he hate anyone
He is in the image of the Eternal
He is beyond birth and death
He is self-existent
He can be attained by the Guru's grace.

The thirty-one Ragas included in the *Holy Granth* are: Sri Rag, Majh, Gauri, Asa, Gujri, Dev Gandhari, Bihagra, Wadhans, Sorath, Dhanasari, Jaitsri, Todi, Bairagi, Tilang, Suhi, Billawal, Gaund, Ramkali, Nat Narayan, Mali Gauda, Maru, Tukhari, Kidara, Bhairo, Basant, Sarang, Malhar, Kanada, Kalyan, Prabhati and Jaijaivanti. Following the compositions figuring under the various Ragas there are a number of other hymns like Sanskrit Slokas, the Gatha and the Swaiyyas.

As a literary work, the *Holy Granth* has some remarkable pieces of poetic excellence both from the view-point of form and content. The language varies from Sanskrit and Persian to Punjabi as spoken during those times in the form of various dialects. The poetic forms are as varied as they are original. They invariably reflect the mood of the text and succeed in communicating it eminently. The Gurus and the Bhaktas take ample liberties with the form and do not seem to observe the rigidities of the traditional poetic moulds. In order that their compositions were popular the Gurus preferred the measures and the tunes of the folk ballads and folk-songs. This must have helped the Sikhs to sing the hymns in their proper tunes. It is a great pity that the Hindustani music having an oral tradition, most of the tunes prescribed by the respective authors are lost with time.

The poetry of the *Holy Granth* is a mine of philosophic thought. It is highly revealing and reflects a way of life which is as simple as ennobling. Every word of it inspires and elevates. It has equal appeal for the erudite scholar as for the least literate reader. It evokes veneration as much from the Sikhs as from the non-Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims alike.

The compilation and the consecration of the *Holy Granth* is a fascinating story of catholicity of outlook, brotherhood of man and communal amity.

With the passing away of Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Sikh Guru, the tradition of the living Guru came to an end. The *Holy Granth* was consecrated as the Guru. Those who looked for His blessings found them in the Book.

And the text does not belong to the Sikh Gurus alone. The *Holy Granth* has aside from the hymns of the Sikh Gurus, compositions of 36 men of God belonging to the various castes and creeds, regions and avocations. Among them are Jaidev of Bengal, Surdas of Braj, Namdev, Trilochan and Parma Nand of Maharashtra, Beni, Rama Nand, Pipa, Sain, Kabir, Ravidas and Bhikan of Uttar Pradesh, Dhanna of Rajasthan and Farid of Multan in the Punjab. Not only this, some of them belonged to the so called lowest of the low castes. Kabir was a weaver, Namdev, a seamster, Sain, a barber, and Ravidas, a tanner. The compiler of the *Holy Granth* did not allow communal or religious distinctions to come in his way. Dhanna was a Jat, while Pipa was a king. Farid was a Muslim divine and Bhikka, a learned scholar of Islam, while Surdas was a Hindu mystic and poet.

Thus when a Sikh bows before and seeks guidance from the *Holy Granth*, he offers his devotion as much to Farid, the renowned Muslim saint, and Jaidev, a Hindu Bhakta of Krishna, as to Guru Nanak or Guru Arjan, the compiler of the *Granth*. It is a commonwealth of the men of God.

Be that as it may, it is said that some of the Guru's detractors made a complaint to the Mughal Emperor Akbar that the work compiled by Guru Arjan Dev included compositions that maligned Islam and Hinduism. Akbar happened to be touring the Punjab in those days. He summoned the Guru along with a copy of the *Holy Granth*. While the Guru did not consider it necessary to go personally, he sent two of his trusted lieutenants along with the compilation. It is said that the King had a hymn read out to him at random. It was a composition of Guru Arjan himself:

> From clay and light God created the world
> The sky, the earth, trees and water are made by Him.
> One must restrain oneself,
> Hell is the punishment of the defaulter,
> The miracle man, the riches, brothers,
> courtiers, kingdom and palaces
> None will come to your rescue at the hour of departure.

It is said, the King heard the hymn and was deeply impressed. However, the detractors contended that it was on purpose that the Emperor was read out a piece that was not objectionable. At this the King himself pointed out a hymn and had it read out to him. This too was found least offensive to anyone. At this the wicked contended that since none of them knew the Gurmukhi script, the Guru's agent read the hymns from memory rather than from the text indicated. At this Akbar had Sahib Dayal, a common citizen, sent for to read out a piece pointed out by the King to him. The hymn read out was:

> You don't see God who dwells in your heart
> And you carry about an idol on your neck.
> A non-believer, you wander about churning water,
> And you die harassed in delusion
> The idol you call God will drown with you.

The Emperor heard it and was greatly moved. He said it was a

work worthy of reverence. He made his offering of 51 gold *mohurs* to the *Holy Granth* and complimented Guru Arjan on the compilation and promised to visit Amritsar personally in the near future to pay his homage to the Guru. The Emperor remembered to keep his promise.

KSD

Guru Tegh Bahadur (1621–1675)

Guru Tegh Bahadur the ninth Sikh Guru did not write much. He has to his credit only 59 *padas* and 57 *slokas* included in the *Holy Granth*. Guru Hargobind, Guru Har Rai and Guru Harkrishan the sixth, seventh and eighth Sikh Gurus did not write any poetry. It is because the times were disturbed and the Sikhs as a community were, more or less, in direct clash with the Mughals who adopted a hostile posture towards them after torturing to martyrdom Guru Arjan Dev, the fifth Sikh Guru.

While the times were out of joint and the political horizon was greatly changed, Guru Tegh Bahadur's verse is gentle and otherworldly in its essential mood. He advocates living a life of non-involvement in worldly pleasures and possessions, remaining steadfast in Dharma and if need be giving away one's life for it. He would not compromise with evil and injustice, come what may.

Guru Tegh Bahadur's verse is in what could be called Hindi not in Punjabi as such, but it tastes like the Punjabi writing of the period.

Specimens of his verse

Man! You must fear even unconscious sins.
Seek support of the good and gracious God,
Who is the killer of all fears.
You must remember Him
Whose praises are sung by the Vedas and the Puranas.
Great is God's name
In remembering Him sins are washed away.
You'll never gain human life again.
It's the only opportunity for attaining salvation.
Says Nanak, sing praises of the kind God
And cross the ocean of life.

Whom shall I tell the agony of my heart?
Given to greed, I rush all around in search of riches.
For the sake of pleasure I suffer much pain.
I serve man after man;
Like a dog I go from door to door.
And never think of God.
I have lived this life in vain.
I am not ashamed of people laughing at me.
Says Nanak, why don't you sing His praises?
The dirt of your body will be washed away.

Now what effort should I make
So that I am rid of my doubts
And swim across the ocean of fear?
I have done no good since I was born.
That's why I am afraid so much.
My fear is that I have not remembered Him
In thought, word and deed.
I haven't gained understanding listening to my Guru.
Like cattle I fill my stomach.
Says Nanak—God, I can be saved
Only if You are kind as ever.

Your youth went waste,
Old age has now assailed you.
Says Nanak, you must remember God,
Your time is passing away.

You have grown old, don't you see?
Death is approaching you.
Says Nanak, listen to me, O fool!
Why don't you remember God?

Wealth, wife and property
That you think are yours
None of these will accompany you
Says Nanak, it is the truth of life.

KSD

Guru Gobind Singh (1661–1708)

The main body of Guru Gobiṇd Singh's poetic compositions is in Braj, conforming to what is called the Riti style. However, a longish

poem called *Chandi di Var*, in Punjabi language, is also attributed to him, and is included in the *Dasam Granth*, whose extremely varied contents were collected after Guru Gobind Singh's passing away by some eminent Sikhs, chiefly Bhai Mani Singh. In the *Dasam Granth*, there is another composition on the same theme called *Chandika Puran*, which tells the same story in greater detail. The sketchy nature of the account in *Chandi di Var* creates a doubt in the reader's mind whether it is the work of Guru Gobind Singh or not.

Chandi di Var consists of fifty-five stanzas (three hundred eighteen lines) in measures commonly used in Punjabi for the narration of heroic tales of war and love. This *Var* narrates the story of the goddess Durga coming to the aid of Indra, who has been defeated and driven out of his kingdom by the demons. After a bloody battle the demons are defeated and destroyed.

The Durga riding her demon-eating Tiger rides all alone to the battle-field where the army of the demons is ranged. In the first round, though surrounded by the demons on all sides, Durga kills a large number of them with her sword and wounds their leader, Mahikha.

Mahikha brings reinforcements only to be killed by Durga, whose sword cuts Mahikha in two from head to foot so mightily that after cutting the dragon's body it strikes against the earth which it penetrates to kill the white bull underneath it and further on the crocodile supporting the bull.

Having restored the kingdom to Indra and the gods, Durga disappears. Thereupon the two demons, Sumbh and Nisumbh, again invade Indra's kingdom, sending the god to seek protection of Durga again. Again Durga comes to the rescue of the god and destroys the army of the demons along with their leaders Dhumralochan, Chand and Mund. At this Raja Sumbh sends against Durga another army under the demon leader Sranavata. As Durga strikes the sword on Sranavata's head, the drops of blood flowing down on earth turn each into a new demon. At this Durga calls upon Kalka to erupt out of her forehead, who with her numerous tongues licks the drops of blood of the head of Sranavata before they could fall on the earth. Thus Sranavata is rendered helpless and killed.

Hearing of the death of Sranavata, the demon Sumbh sends Nisumbh to fight Durga. Durga kills him, too, so that Sumbh has

himself to take the field. But he also gets killed, which marks the end of the battle. The gods are restored to their kingdom, the mark of royalty put by Durga herself on Indra's brow, never again to be challenged by anybody. And Durga's well-merited fame spreads over all the fourteen worlds.

The description of these battles is only a structure of rhetoric, in which one round of battle is hardly distinguishable from another and there is a repetition of some few phrases with minor variations. Both in content and spirit, this *Var* is incompatible with the tenets of Sikhism. A symbolic meaning is sought to be read into it but no distinct parallel to the contemporary situation can be detected. The story is entirely unhistorial and if any meaning can be put on it, it turns out to be a version of some prehistorical myth.

SSS

Specimens of his verse

Go tell the plight of his devotees to my beloved Lord
The luxury of soft beds is agony without Him,
It's like living in a snake-pit
The goblet is poison and the cup a knife
Life is like receiving punches of butcher's dagger.
I would rather live in hiding, with my beloved
It's hell living with strangers without Him.

As ordained by God, the Lord Eternal,
A new way of life is evolved.
All Sikhs are asked to accept the *Holy Granth* as the Guru
The *Guru Granth* should be accepted
As the living God.
Those who wish to meet God
Will find Him in the Word.

He who has no form, features, class or caste,
He who belongs to no community,
He who has no colour, no complexion, no mark, no garb,
No one knows what He is like.
Immoveable, self-refulgent and all-powerful,
He is the Indra of millions of Indras,
He is the king of kings,
He is the sovereign of the three worlds
of demigods, human beings and demons.

The jungle and the woods remember him every moment.
How can one call Him by all His names?
The wise give Him names according to His manifestations.

What God has told me Himself
I tell the world.
Those who meditate on Him
Only they will go to Heaven in the end.
God and Godmen are one
There is no difference between them—
Like the tide that rises from water
And subsides in water again.

KSD

Bhai Gurudas (1558–1637)

After the Sikh Gurus, the most important literary figure in the Sikh tradition is Bhai Gurudas. He was born in A.D. 1558 in the village of Gilwali near Amritsar. The grandson of Chand Bhan, younger brother of Guru Amar Das's father Tej Bhan, he was the son of a first cousin of Guru Amar Das.

He lost his father when he was just three years old, and mother at the age of twelve. He had no other relative, brother or sister to take care of him, so his uncle Amar Das took him into his care and brought him to Goindwal.

It seems he did not marry all his life, which he passed in the service of the four Sikh Gurus, from Guru Amar Das to Guru Hargobind. The major part of his life was passed in the service of Guru Ram Das and Guru Arjan Dev, the fourth and fifth Sikh Gurus. He did yeoman's service to Guru Arjan Dev when the latter's elder brother, Prithi Chand, was maligning him.

Bhai Gurudas grew up to be a man of deep learning, grounded in the classical, Brahmanical tradition. He composed poetry in Braj Bhasha more intensively indeed than in Punjabi in which only 39 long poems or *vars* of his consisting of a total of 913 stanzas or 6473 lines, are available.

According to Bhai Kahan Singh of Nabha, Bhai Gurudas died in August A.D. 1637.

His first *var* in Punjabi is nearly twice as long as any of the other *vars* and can indeed be divided into two parts. The first part

consists of twenty-two stanzas in which Bhai Gurudas has given a brief cosmology. The second part is devoted to events connected with Guru Nanak's life in which myth predominates over fact.

The other thirty-nine *vars* relate to famous figures of the Bhakti tradition such as Kabir, Namdev and Trilochan, eminent Sikhs from the time of Guru Nanak to that of Guru Hargobind and the Hindu trinity, ten incarnations of Vishnu and some other mythical figures.

In *var* twenty-four are sung the praises of the first Sikh Guru.

As mentioned earlier, Bhai Gurudas did effective propaganda against Guru Arjan's elder brother and rival, Prithi Chand, and he has devoted the thirty-sixth *var* to downright condemnation of Prithi Chand and those who accepted him as Guru against Guru Arjan Dev.

In the other *vars* Bhai Gurudas has sung of different kinds of virtue and goodness as also of the omnipresence of God, who is described as pervading everything in the universe, enjoining the Sikhs to cultivate steadfast, unquestioned devotion towards the Guru.

Bhai Gurudas's poetry is generally regarded as the key to *Gurubani*, which is substantially true. For apart from singing the praises of the Gurus and of the omnipresent and all-pervading Divinity, he preaches in a very concrete and illustrative manner, the moral virtues inculcated by the Gurus, viz., service, humility, tolerance, forbearance from speaking or thinking ill of others and unquestioned devotion to the Guru. To make his point, he uses a kind of extended metaphor which is metaphysical in the way some of the conceits of the English metaphysical poets of the 16th and 17th centuries are. For instance, he describes the earth as a model of tolerance and humility, the cotton seed as that of self-sacrifice. This metaphysical metaphor or conceit has been extensively used by the father of modern Punjabi poetry, Bhai Vir Singh, also.

What is most remarkable about Bhai Gurudas's poetry is his diction and language, which, based on the idiom of the Central districts of the Punjab, is comparatively free from the Sadhavi idiom and its prepositions and conjunctions, which are so common in the diction of the Gurus.

Bhai Gurudas assisted Guru Arjan in the compilation of the *Holy Granth* which is his greatest contribution to Punjabi literature.

It is said that Guru Arjan Dev offered to include Bhai Gurudas's verse in the *Granth*, but because of his great humility, he chose to deny himself this great honour. Accordingly, Gurudas's work is described as a key to the *Gurubani*.

SSS

Specimens of his verse

Getting up early in the morning, bathing and
remembering God
Polite talk, humility, and giving alms,
Scanty sleep, frugal food, fewer words,
Hard work, clean living and yet not putting on airs
Seeking, day and night, the company of godmen
Contemplating on the Word, getting close to the Guru,
Remaining hopeful amidst hopelessness,
This is the way of a true Sikh.

Accursed is the head that doesn't bow before
the Guru and touch his feet.
Accursed are the eyes that see not the
Guru but others' spouses.
Accursed are the ears that don't listen to the
sermon and meditate on it.
Accursed is the tongue that speaks anything
other than the Guru's Word.
Accursed are the limbs without God's service
The Guru's grace gives peace to the devotee.

I am a criminal, a sinner, I am faceless and bad,
I am a thief, keeping unsavoury company, a gambler,
coveting others' possessions.
I am a backbiter, vicious, dissimulator and cheat,
Given to sex, anger, greed, attachment and ego.
I am a traitor, ungrateful, no one would look at me;
Remembering God and singing His praises I've been blessed.
I am sacrifice to him who remains powerless in spite of
being powerful.
I am sacrifice to him who remains humble in spite of
great honour.
I am sacrifice to him who forgets his wisdom and
becomes innocent.

I am sacrifice to him who follows the dictates of the master.
I am sacrifice to him who follows the Guru's path.
I am sacrifice to him who treats this world as a
transitory abode.
He is happy in this world and will be acceptable in the next.
KSD

4

The Sufis

The Sufi cult is akin to mysticism. It is believed in some quarters that it was born out of the interaction between Semitic Islam and Aryan Vedantism on the soil of India. This is not the whole truth. Sufism took its birth in Arabia in the 9th century. However, the Aryan perceptions in Iran and then in India influenced it a great deal, more particularly in accentuating the emotional content as against the dry-as-dust self-denial of the Arabs. The Arabs laid stress on asceticism and torturing the body, while the later Sufis in Iran and India under the influence of Greek philosophy, Platonic ideology, Christian faith, Vedantist thinking, Buddhist lore, etc. believed in leading an emotionally rich life. They drank and danced and advocated that physical love can sublimate itself into spiritual love. They had faith in God; they loved the Prophet but they maintained that the *Murshed* or Guru could also lead to Divine Reality.

Literally speaking, a Sufi is one who is pure or one who goes about with a woollen blanket. In Greek, he is a Sufi who is enlightened. The cardinal features of the Sufi cult are:

(a) God obtains in all and all obtain in God.
(b) Religion is the way of life; it does not necessarily lead to *nirvana.*
(c) All happenings take place as per the will of God: nothing happens if He does not ordain it.
(d) The soul is distinct from the physical body and will merge into Divine Reality according to one's deeds.
(e) It is the Guru whose grace shows the way and leads to union with God.

The Sufis believe that there are four stages in one's journey to realization:

(a) Leading a disciplined life as prescribed in Islam (Nasoot).
(b) Following the path delineated by the *Murshed* or Guru (Malkoot).
(c) Gaining enlightenment (Jabroot).
(d) On realization of truth, getting merged into Divine Reality (Fana).

The practitioners of the Sufi cult came to India following the Muslim conquerors, more with a view to propagating Islam. There came to be established several centres at Lahore, Pakpattan, Kasur, Multan and Uch in the Punjab. However, the most popular sects among them were those who combined in themselves the best of every faith and promoted it amongst the people. Bulleh Shah, the noted Sufi poet, belonged to this group.

The Sufis loved God as one would love one's sweetheart. God for them is the husband and the human being His wife. The man must serve, love, undergo asceticism, gain enlightenment and then get merged in God. The Indian Sufis laid stress on repeating the name (*Japu*), concentration (*Dhyan*) and meditation (*Habs-i-dam*). A Sufi must eschew sin, repent, live a simple and contented life and should look for the grace of the *Murshed* or the Guru. The Sufis maintain that the soul has been separated from the Divine Reality and the supreme mission of life is to achieve reunion with God.

Like the Iranian Sufis who sang the praises of Yusuf Zulaikha, Laila Majnun and Shirin Farhad, the Sufis in the Punjab idealised the romances of Heer Ranjha, Sohni Mahiwal and Sassi Punnun. Preoccupied with the metaphysical, they resorted to the use of symbols drawn from the everyday life around them like the spinning-wheel, Persian wheel, boat, dowry, etc. As poets they employed *kafi*, *baramah*, *athwara*, *siharfi*, *doha*, *baint* and *deudh* as their favourite poetic forms. Their language is simple and conversational, light and lyrical. There is no denying that they made an indelible impression on the life and thinking of the people of the Punjab. More important among the Sufi poets who wrote in Punjabi were Shah Husain, Sultan Bahu and Shah Sharaf. They were preceded by Farid in the 12th century and followed by Bulleh Shah, Ali Hyder, Wajid and others later in the 17th and 18th centuries.

KSD

Shah Husain (1539–1593)

Shah Husain who ranks with Farid and Buleh Shah as a Sufi poet has the image of the hippy of today. Well-read, highly creative, spiritually evolved and yet indulging in activities that besmeared his image in society. On the one hand, he studied with Abu-Bakr and Bahlol, the Sufi saints of Chinyot and acquired the title of Hafiz (one who has committed the entire Holy Quran to memory) after which he was attached to Data Ganj Baksh in Lahore for propagating Sufi tenets. It is said that at times he would recite the Quran the whole night through standing on the banks of the river Ravi. And on the other hand, he is known to indulge in drinking and dancing, visiting the prostitutes and indulging in homosexuality! He wore red garments and had unduly intimate relations with a Hindu youth, Madho Lal. So much so that he came to be known as Madho Lal Husain. It is believed that he indulged in all this erratic and anti-social behaviour to attract people's ire which is one of the ways of a mystic.

Born in Lahore in 1539 Shah Husain is said to have lived for 54 years. He was known to Guru Arjan Dev and is also believed to have met Akbar, the Mughal Emperor.

Shah Husain has over 160 *Kafis* to his credit besides *slokas* and other compositions written to music as the prevailing practice with the Sikh Gurus was.

According to Dr. Lajwanti, the author of *Punjabi Sufi Poets*, we have in Shah Husain a happy intermingling of Iranian thought and Indian way of life. He may have lived a permissive life but as far as his poetry is concerned, there is little nonconformity in its content. It is sound socially and philosophically.

Like other Sufi saints of his time, Shah Husain propagated among his followers respect for human life, belief in God, acceptance of the divine will, keeping the company of holy men and truthful and righteous living under the constant guidance of a *Murshed* or Guru.

Shah Husain wrote in an impeccable Central Punjabi idiom and can claim to be one of those writers who have brought medieval Punjabi closest to modern Punjabi usage.

His poetry has echoes of pangs of separation and the agony of an alienated soul that make for fine lyricism and spontaneity of expression in his verse. His musicality, at times, surpasses that of quite a few of his contemporaries.

Specimens of his verse

I see deceit, wherever I look and that makes me restless
The world is a cheat, you must retire to a secluded
corner, O Husain!

Whom shall I tell the agony of my suffering?
I am getting mad,
The pangs of separation have overwhelmed me,
Whom shall I tell?
Says Husain the fakir of God
Come and see the plight of the humble,
Whom else shall I tell?

Separated from my love the nights have grown longer.
The flesh is worn out and the bones have started rattling.
Love cannot be hidden howsoever I may try
The affliction has taken roots
Ranjha has become a Jogi
And I am his Jogin
Why has he abandoned me?
Says Husain, the faqir of God,
I cling to His apron-strings.

KSD

Shah Sharaf (1629–1724)

Shah Sharaf is known to have been born in A.D. 1629 in the town of Batala, now in Gurdaspur district of Punjab, and died in A.D. 1724.

It is said that he was suspected of illicit relations with his widowed sister-in-law by his wife, protesting against which he became a fakir, disciple of Sheikh Mohammad Fazil of Lahore.

His verse is available in *dohiras* (couplets) and *kafis*. Its tone is consistently saintly, preaching resignation, service of mankind and meditation. In the Sufi tradition, he addresses God and his preceptor as his beloved and pines in separation from them. He writes in simple language, without much prosodic skill, but is strongly influenced by *Gurubani*, so that he often uses what is called metaphysical conceit, notably in the manner of Bhai Gurudas.

The language of his verse can be termed as Central Punjabi, with a slight tinge of Multani.

He has also written what is called a *shutarnama*, or 'On Camels'.

SSS

Specimen of his verse

Getting ground under a millstone, and heating
the colour into thick paste
And thus getting one's robes dyed, one acquires the
hue of godliness
Drinking the cup of his love and living after many a death,
Blowing it red hot in the smithy and getting
beaten with a hammer,
Dismembered like cotton and crushed like sesame,
Getting cooked in an oven, and thus lighting the candle,
Making a *Rabab* out of love and getting bound with strings,
Singing His praises Sharaf plays on *sarod*.

KSD

Sultan Bahu (1631–1691)

Sultan Bahu was born in A.D. 1631 in the village of Awan in the present Jhang district of Pakistan. He died in A.D. 1691 in the village of Dahar Jania in the same district where his mausoleum stands to this day.

Against the common run of Sufi fakirs, Sultan Bahu lived in royal style, as his name indicates. He came of an aristocratic family of Arabic origin and had four wives. Bahu is probably only a diminutive of his full name which is not known. His father, Sultan Bayazid, got the village of Dahar Jania as a fief from the emperor Shahjahan. His mother, Rasti, was of a religious bent of mind, which might be the main reason for his becoming a Sufi.

Bahu belonged to the Kadiri school of Sufis and was a disciple of Hazrat Habib-ullah. He is not defiant towards the *Sharia*, though he is fond of song and dance.

The tone of his verse is melancholy. He lays stress on the Sufi formula of 'dying before death'. However, he was against the show of religiosity and piety. He is said to have been a scholar of Arabic and Persian. According to the author of *Tawarikh-I-Bahu*, he authored a hundred and forty books in Arabic and Persian, though none of these seems to be extant. His Punjabi writing is not very extensive either. It is written in a form called *Davayya*, after every line of which the syllable of 'hu' is added.

He defines the Sufi doctrine of love, as he understood it:

The heart is burning in the fire of separation
in which alone can God be seen.
It neither lives nor dies.

SSS

Specimens of his verse

I am neither a Hindu nor a Muslim
I am neither a Mulla nor a Qazi
I seek neither hell nor heaven
Says Bahu without union with God
Everything else is false.

They repeat Kalma with their lips
Without a devout heart
Only lovers read Kalma with devotion,
Those who only talk hardly ever know Him.

There is nothing false nor is there a truthful path
Neither is there death nor life
There is no difference between east and west
Neither in the day nor in the night
Is he closer to you than your own aorta
Says Bahu, you have only to keep within.

KSD

Bulhe Shah (1680–1758)

The next most important Sufi poet is Bulhe Shah, born in A.D. 1680 in a Sayyed family in the village Pandoki, near Kasur now in district Lahore. He became a fakir of the Kadiri order as a disciple of Shah Inayat, an Arain peasant who is known to have written in Persian some religious and moral treatises. Perhaps in his considerable grounding in the Muslim tradition, Bulhe Shah shows the influence of his teacher. The major part of Bulhe Shah's verse is in the Kafi form like Shah Husain's but he has written in some other folk forms also, as *bara maha* and *siharfi* (Thirty letters). Guru Nanak and Guru Arjan also wrote a *bara maha* each. The *siharfi* or acrostic is a poem in which every stanza begins consecutively with a letter of the Persian alphabet. Like Shah Husain again Bulhe Shah's philosophy is monistic

and he believes in the identity of the divine soul or godhead with the human soul. Another tenet of his, like that of the Sufis and the Bhaktas, is that union with God can be attained best through love, on the strength of which man can transcend the Muslim religious law (Sharia). This union with God can, however, be attained through the mediation of the preceptor. This concept is further extended to idealistic love between man and woman and even between persons of the same sex. The experience of this union is however, of a mystical nature and cannot be communicated in words. It is like the experience of sweetmeats by one who is dumb.

As against this, worldly life is a myth, a brightly-coloured flower with no fragrance or permanence.

What distinguishes Bulhe Shah from Shah Husain is his frequent references to the Hebrew prophets who attained union with God after going through extremely difficult and painful ordeals. For instance, Abraham had to slaughter his son as sacrifice to God, Zakaria was sawn alive and Junas stayed in the belly of a fish for twelve years. Thus devotion and love for God are states of extreme suffering. Shah Husain rarely mentions any of these prophets and eschews all references even to the prophet of Islam.

Another distinction is Bulhe Shah's frequent acknowledgement of his great love and devotion to his precepter, Shah Inayat. Shah Husain makes no such reference to anybody.

Bulhe Shah betrays the influence of the Vedanta of the Vaishnavite School and addresses his entreaties and prayers to the Hindu incarnations of God, Rama and Krishna as well, more particularly Krishna.

The elevation of the legendary love of Heer and Ranjha, beginning with Shah Husain and referred to by other contemporaries of his like Bhai Gurudas, is maintained in Bulhe Shah so that Ranjha becomes a metaphor for God and Heer for the human soul. In one of his verses, he says:

> To people the man called Ranjha is a cowherd
> But he is the embodiment of my belief and creed
> and I invite him to my house.

Bulhe Shah is acutely conscious of the differences and disputes between Hindus and Muslims and decries the persistence of both parties in their respective positions. He writes:

Ram Chand in one place and Fateh Mohammad in another
This is the dispute from times long past.

The mosques are occupied by Kafirs (believers in false prophets) and Thakurdwaras (Hindu temples) by thugs.

Curiously enough for all his eschewal of Hindu-Muslim differences, Bulhe Shah is pained over the civil strife between the Muslims and the Sikhs. He laments:

The doors of doom's tortures have opened
The Punjab is in a very sorry plight.
The stealers of blankets have become rulers
The Mughals have had to quaff cups of poison.

Bulhe Shah's verses are very popular among the Punjabis. The reason evidently is his romantic defiance of the Muslim Sharia and an apparent condemnation of both Hindu and Muslim bigotry and ritual. But as a poet he is much overrated nor is there any profundity in his beliefs. His language and versification are simple to a fault. There is overmuch repetition of some simplistic concepts and motifs.

SSS

Specimens of his verse

Calling 'Ranjha' again and again
I have become Ranjha myself;
Pray call me Dhido Ranjha
Don't you address me as Heer.

One must say what occurs to one;
The tongue must have its way.
If I were to tell a lie;
I feel safe.
If I were to tell the truth
There would be a bonfire.
I am afraid of either.
The tongue feels reluctant
But one must say what occurs to one.

You must leave the world one day,
And rest in the grave.
The worms will eat your flesh.
Remember God, don't you forget Him;

Get up, and snore no more.
You have to leave this world
When your charm will all be gone,
You can't live here for ever
Get up and snore no more.

KSD

Ali Haider (1690–1751)

Ali Haider born in A.D. 1690 in the village of Kachian in what is the district of Multan in Pakistan today, is another Sufi poet of some eminence. He was a disciple of Khwaja Fakharud-din of Delhi, probably of the Chishti School. His verse in Punjabi is available in traditional collections arranged according to end rhymes and five *siharfis*. He is known to have written in Persian and Arabic also. There is intensity of feeling in him but his language has hardly risen above the aboriginal. The prosody is rather loose and irregular and the verse-form that became popular at a later period with Waris Shah and others is in its transitional stage. His experience of the beauty of feminine youth is very direct and romantic and he tries to derive an idealistic meaning from it:

Leaping high I throw a glance at my lover's yard,
I come with open arms towards you, to hold you
close to my bosom.

In one of his compositions he condemns the Indian Amirs and soldiers who failed to deal adequately with the invasion of Nadir Shah and thus strikes a patriotic note:

Have they no poison to eat and die,
These Hindustanis devoid of shame.
These Rajas are altogether without grace
And the Turanis without any feeling of honour,
The scapegraces render brimful treasures to Persians
and Khurusanis.
They should drown their noses in cups of water
If they cannot find any larger pools.

SSS

Specimens of his verse

You are shy and modest;

And yet you use your blandishments,
You would rather come forward and embrace me
And yet you are wearing a veil.

It is the pleasant month of Baisakh,
But I continue to pine for you.
I am turning pale like mustard.
I send you words with birds,
And keep on trying my luck.
Do send me a message of cheer.
Let someone say how you look,
I am dying like a fish without water,
Do sometimes ask how the patient feels.
The Faqir shouts day and night,
He longs only to see you.

As rulers they sit on carpets
And perpetrate injustice
They treat the workers as low-caste
And they suck their blood,
They make them labour without payment
They have no fear of God.
The curses of those tortured
Must undo them for good.
The privileged ones exploit the professionals.
Loaded with the debt of the poor
They make their way to hell.

KSD

5

The Kissa

I

One specific form of poetic narration in Punjabi is what is called Kissa, an Arabic word current in West Asia. It owes its birth to the love story of Yusuf (Joseph), the Jewish prophet, and the Egyptian beauty Zuleikha who came to purchase a slave in the market where Yusuf was brought for sale by a slave-trader and fell in love with him. This story is found in the *Holy Quran* for which reason, perhaps, it is called Ahsan-ul-Kasas the best of Kissas. Muslim poets in West Asia have taken it for a model in their love stories, investing selfless and unreserved love between man and woman as an approach to divine love. It is in this spirit that the Kissa in Punjabi as well as in countries of West Asia is distinguished from medieval Indian love stories and even those of Sanskrit drama which are secular in spirit.

Heer Ranjha

The earliest Kissa extant in Punjabi is that of Heer and Ranjha by Damodar Gulati, a Hindu Arora who claims to be a resident of the heroine's village, Jhang, and to be a witness to many of the events in the story. He is reputed to have been a *patwari* or land-records official of the place. According to Damodar's own version, however, he came to Jhang of the Syals in search of livelihood and opened a shop there under the patronage of Chuchak, father of the heroine.

The text of the story followed by succeeding Kissa writers is substantially that of Damodar's with minor variations here and there, especially towards the end. Dhido is the youngest of the seven sons of Maujam (Muazzam) subsequently shortened to Majnu

by succeeding writers. The elder six are married and Dhido only betrothed when his father dies. Like Joseph or Yusuf, the prophet, Dhido was so handsome that all the six of his sisters-in-law were attracted towards him which his brothers did not like. Also to usurp Dhido's share of the paternal land, the brothers were conspiring to kill him when he escaped with his life and travelled towards Jhang where the Chief Chuchak's daughter was reputed to be a most beautiful maid. On the strength of his own manly beauty and smarting under the taunts of his sisters-in-law, Dhido won Heer's love during their first meeting.

Dhido is employed as a cattleherd by Chuchak on Heer's recommendation, where for twelve years he serves Heer's father as cattleherd and enjoys Heer's unstinted love. Chuchak's people do not like this, so Heer is married off to Saida, son of the Chief of Rangpur Khera near Multan. Heer does not take kindly to her wedded husband and waits patiently for Dhido to come in the guise of a fakir to take her away. However, when Dhido and Heer elope from Rangpur, they are pursued by Saida's people and overtaken somewhere near the town of Kabula. Dhido and Heer approach the Qazi before whom Dhido deposes that he is a fakir and Heer is his wife, but that Jats attracted by Heer's beauty, want to snatch her from him. The Qazi decides in favour of the Kheras. But when the anguished Dhido prays to heaven, fire breaks out and rapidly encompasses the town. On the protests of the inhabitants of the town who think that the fire is divine retribution for injustice to the fakir Dhido, the Governor of Kabula reverses the Qazi's decision. Dhido and Heer then trudge towards the region called Lamma, the country around Pakpatan.

In his story Damodar narrates two events which subsequent writers of the story have not accepted. One is Heer's fight, when she is a maid of eleven or twelve, with Naura Chandhar who had come to steal her father's cattle. The second is the fight between the Kheras and the Nahars.

Damodar's story is narrated in the local dialect of Jhang which lends it a particular regional charm. But subsequent writers rejected the dialect in favour of the central form of the language. The people of the villages in the story are Muslims but they have not yet forsaken their old Hindu customs, so that even marriages are arranged by Brahmins and Dhido as a yogi holds in awe the villagers who are Muslim by faith.

Damodar presents Chuchak as a big landlord, indeed a local chief who claims to be Akbar's equal. He places the story in the time of Akbar the Great, though the specific date he gives, 1529 Vikrami, is some fifty years earlier than Akbar and the name of the local Governor of Kabula, Abul-Fatih, is indicative of the time of Sher Shah Suri.

Another peculiarity of Damodar's narration is his harping upon the phrases, 'I saw it with my own eyes' in connection with the various incidents of the story.

The illiteracy of Chuchak and others of his kind and the ostentatious expenditure on the marriage of Heer by both sides is characteristic and is in large part truly descriptive of the conditions of Punjab village life upto recent days.

According to his own account, Damodar was a contemporary of the fifth Sikh Guru, Arjun Dev, and of Shah Husain.

Mirza Sahiban

Another Kissa of the same time is that of the love of Mirza and Sahiban first narrated by Pilu, a Muslim Jat of the central districts and a contemporary of Guru Arjun Dev. Pilu's text is available only in bits and parts but a complete version of the same story is furnished by Hafiz Barkhurdar. This story and its treatment by Pilu and his successors is indeed a more realistic account of life in the Punjab, its passions of love and hate unspoiled by the sophistications under Sufi influence as seen in the story of Heer and Ranjha. It treats love as a plainly secular phenomenon, not as something approaching the divine.

Mirza as a young lad lives with his maternal uncle where he and his cousin Sahiban, of about the same age, get their lessons in the Quran together at the village mosque. This togetherness creates an infatuation between the two cousins. But Mirza's maternal uncle Khiva, a Jat Rajput of the Syal clan, has betrothed his daughter to Nura, a young man of the Chandhar clan, and is not willing to break his word and give Sahiban even to his sister's son, which would be quite legitimate according to Muslims' marriage tradition. Mirza elopes with Sahiban to take her to his native village Danabad. He is pursued by Sahiban's brothers and her betrothed and their companions. Mirza has an extra fleet horse, but he is so confident of his prowess as an archer that he would stop halfway in the wood

to have a wink of sleep at mid-day, against Saheban's protestations and warnings of the danger they were exposed to. When Mirza goes to sleep, she hangs his quiver of arrows on a lofty branch of tree, so that if and when overtaken by her brothers, Mirza may be persuaded to flee with her on his swift horse. But Mirza wakes up too late when the Syals and Chandhars are right upon him. They kill Mirza and Sahiban throws herself on a dry bush which she has set on fire, and burns herself to death.

The story does not take shelter behind the Sufi idealisation and the lovers pay the price of their passion. But the rejection of this idealisation in the story has given it a bad odour in contrast to the feudal ideal of love. Thus there is a common saying in the Punjab that there have been only two-and-a-half true lovers in the world. The two fully true loves are those of Heer and Ranjha and Sohni and Mahiwal, while that of Mirza and Sahiban is only a half-true love because of the element of carnal passion in it.

The story has been treated as a tragedy in the Greek and Western style of feudal love. It demonstrates more than the idealistic love of Eastern Sufi philosophy, the social, family and individual tensions of the people of those times. Those swayed by the Sufi ideal are inclined to blame Sahiban for showing greater concern for the safety of her brothers than for her lover's.

The story is narrated in a metre which is specific to heroism in love and war in Punjabi folklore, whereas the metrical form of the narration in the other love stories is rather sophisticated and more prone to drown the action in descriptive and reflective narration. Broadly speaking, the story of Heer and Ranjha as narrated by Damodar and other poets like the great Waris Shah is indicative of the escapism of the mind of the people of West Punjab, hesitant to cross the brink of tragedy, whereas that of Mirza and Sahiban bravely faces an event of socially tragic dimensions and converts it into a tragedy of fate.

In true feudal fashion, Pilu condemns Sahiban for failing to come up to the ideal of true love, according to which a woman should not waver in her loyalty to her lover, knowingly or unknowingly. But at the same time Pilu deplores the death of Mirza in conditions in which his brothers could not come to his rescue, an ideal of brotherly love which is so often evoked in Punjabi folklore.

Pilu avoids all dilations upon social customs and mores, but

concentrates on the tension and hostility between the two sides and their unwillingness to come to a compromise.

Hafiz Barkhurdar follows close on Pilu's heels in his narration of the same love story. Indeed, he starts with claiming that he was induced to write this story by a crow coming from the poet Pilu's grave. He has used the same metre and style as Pilu's and has taken over some of Pilu's lines in toto. But while Pilu makes indirect references to Sahiban's beauty, Barkhurdar is more direct and lyrical in this respect. For instance, describing Sahiban's charm he says:

> The colour of majith (Deep Red) drips from
> Sahiban's face to smear the earth.
> The two earrings falling on her cheeks are two swans
> picking their feed of jewels.
> Her frame is slim and wavy like the needle of
> the spinning-wheel.

Like Pilu, Barkhurdar also dwells upon the relentlessness of fate and accuses women of failing the test of love.

Barkhurdar is also credited with introducing the love stories of Sassi Punnu and Yusuf Zuleikha to Punjabi literature. Perhaps he is at his best in Yusuf-Zuleikha in which he has used a new measure, Davayya, which was later used to great effect by Hashim Shah and Ahmed Yar. The story is told in a dignified style in keeping with the sanctity pertaining to it. There are some quite vivid descriptions of nature.

To Ahmed Yar goes the credit of using first of all the *bait* form of verse in his romance of Heer and Ranjha. It was subsequently used with great effect by Muqbal and Waris Shah in their narratives of the same tale who also follow many of the details given by Ahmed Yar and the change of names of characters from Damodar: Saida instead of Sahiba, Aju instead of Ali and Balnath instead of Sidh Bagai. Muqbal's dates of birth and death are not known but from the date of writing of the *Jang-Namah* given by him, we can conclude that he was considerably senior to Waris Shah who was born in A.D. 1735. The *Jang-Namah* was written in A.D. 1747. No date of writing the Kissa of Heer is given but it can be inferred that it was written before the *Jang-Namah.*

Muqbal is credited with having written a Siharfi also in praise of Pir Abdul Qadir Jani. This also is in *bait* form.

Muqbal's Heer is decidedly an improvement on Ahmed Yar's Heer. It is much more facile and has a more refined style. Indeed, Waris Shah has followed Muqbal's version in both substance and diction very closely, so that it can be said that Waris Shah's Heer is a more detailed, more sophisticated and more urbanised version of the same story. Muqbal's stanza is invariably of four lines, while Waris takes some of his stanzas to greater length. Muqbal's language is simpler and much less Persianised. Even while treating Heer's love as consistent with Sufi ideals, he is not restrained from condemning women in the feudal traditions (Waris Shah also follows him with even greater gusto). For instance, he puts the following words into Ranjha's mouth:

> There is no profit from the love of women,
> And one should not seek their friendship.
> The snake will not refrain from biting,
> One may feed it on milk all its life.

But otherwise the tone of his narrative is quite polite and restrained in keeping with the Sufi ideology.

The *Jang-Namah* relates the story of the battle between Imam Husain, son of Ali and the prophet Mohammad's daughter, Fatima, and Yazid, a rival Caliph. Muqbal provides a rather strange introduction to the story.

The metre of the stanza is *dohira*, the diction is refined and simple and properly enriched with metaphors. The use of Persian words is more frequent but does not make the style heavy. Muqbal condemns strife and war and appeals for peace.

Waris Shah (1735–1784)

Waris Shah was born in Jandiala Sherkhan, now in the district of Gujranwala in Pakistan in a Sayyed family. His father's name was Gul Sher Shah. Only one work is ascribed to him, the love story of Heer and Ranjha. Some scholars have credited him with having written also a Kissa of Sassi and Punnu and some *siharfis* as, for instance, Dr Mohan Singh in his edition of Heer by Waris Shah.

He lost his father and mother at an early age and perhaps feeling oppressed under the tutelage of his two elder brothers, he went to Kasur and became a disciple of Pir Makhdum. He seems to have had a good education in Islamic texts and in grammar and the art of writing, as can be inferred from the list of texts

mentioned by him as being taught in the popular madarasa. But like Shakespeare he seems to have learnt much more from life, which knowledge he parades like a pedagogue at various places in his work. For instance, he gives long lists of Hindu and Muslim sects and orders, castes and professions, of books of medicine, generally of the Greek system and prattles at length about legal administration and history. In relevant contexts he gives long, even irrelevant lists of ornaments and garments, eatables served and gifts given at weddings and makes frequent observations on all aspects of life. Even so he does not show any systematic knowledge of the things he talks about. A later writer of Kissa, Ahmed Yar has well said that Waris Shah, the master of poetry, has ground coarse like an undented mill.

He has substantially followed the story first narrated by Damodar with variations introduced by Ahmed Yar and Muqbal.

Waris Shah's strongest point is the gift of the gab. He uses the language of central Punjab with just a smattering of the western dialect. He shows his knowledge of Islamic texts by interspersing *Ayats* or verses from the Quran to make his point. The tenor of his diction is loud, foxy, even foul. At the same time, it shows considerable urbanity and sophistication. His wisdom is that of a man who is deeply grounded in feudal lore and can be detached at the same time.

The narrative, as in the Kissa generally, is in dialogue form with an impressive dramatic directness. But the frequent interspersion of *Kalam-i-Shair* (the poet's observation) in these dialogues is sometimes very long-winded and not always to the point. He heaps detail upon detail without regard to realistic probability or even possibility. But for all this, he makes delightful reading as a mountebank of wit and humour would be before an audience of various feudal ranks and temperaments.

He has said so much about the various concerns of life in a feudal village and with so much wit and irony that it is difficult to find any sin of omission there.

But the sins of commission are alas! too many. His descriptions of the beauty of Heer and even of Ranjha are exaggerated beyond measure, as was the common practice of poets of those days.

In heaping details with little regard for readability and making witty observations and sallies of wit and humour without regard to decency and politeness, he may be compared to Rabelais. Indeed

it will be only fit to call his humour Rabelaisian. The hero of the story, Dhido Ranjha, a handsome young man, is simple and quiet at the same time. He is driven from home as much by the injustice done by his brothers in giving him as his share in the paternal holding, barren and infertile acres which are not likely to give him a comfortable living, as by the amorous taunts of his sisters-in-law. Once started on his course of a vagabond like Tom Jones of Henry Fielding, he halts at nothing that comes in his way. He is impolite to the daughter of an artisan who is attracted by his beauty, rude to the Mulla of the mosque in which he finds shelter for the night, is gruffy and amorous towards the two wives of Luddan, the boatman who agreed to carry him across the river under the importunities of those very women who are struck by the young man's good looks, he is overly forward and reckless that he goes to sleep on the bed spread for Heer the daughter of the chief of the place in her riverside hut; he comes out with ready and bold responses to Heer's apologies and protestations of love at first sight.

When he is employed as cattleherd by Heer's father Chuchak, he acquires complete mastery of the situation. He rules over the heart of not only Heer but all her friends.

There is nobody in the whole village to put in him any fear of the people of Chuchak's fraternity who might be led to violence at his outraging their moral and social codes. Poor Kaido, a fakir and perhaps a distant cousin of Chuchak's, is effective, through his remonstrances, only to make Chuchak marry his daughter off to the son of a family of a distant village, Rangpur Khera, against her wishes. The Qazi who performs the Nikah or wedding rite does not heed her protests and thus Heer is carried away by the party of her wedded husband. But Waris Shah must spoil the pleasure of Khera's by sending Dhido in Heer's train, for the sole reason that the buffaloes given in Heer's dowry were unmanageable without him; and on their way to Rangpur Heer puts herself in a compromising position, with Dhido entering her palanquin.

At Rangpur Heer treats her wedded husband as an ass and holds everyone in her father-in-law's house in awe and dread. Thereafter Dhido has to go to Rangpur in response to Heer's request sent through a messenger.

But Dhido has to go there in the guise of a yogi. He does not simply put on a yogi's garb but must first go to the place of Jogi

Bal Nath on the hillock of Karane and get initiated into the yogi's order. One fails to understand why a pretender should have to get himself actually initiated, though this is a detail coming down from Damodar. But Waris utilises it to poke fun at the Jogis' principles and pretensions. Here again Dhido is rude to the yogi and his other disciples and shows his true colour after he has got duly initiated. As a satire on the order of the yogis, this episode is quite effective but it has really no place in the story.

Another incident that Waris Shah introduces is Dhido's meeting with a shepherd who tears Dhido's pretences of a yogi to shreds.

In Rangpur Kheri again Ranjha is parading before the womenfolk of the village. His confrontation with Heer's sister-in-law Sathi occupies unduly large space. It has no part in forwarding the story and is virtually an independent treatise in which Waris Shah makes great display of his wisdom as a cynical observer of the ways of the world, especially of women.

However, the best part of Waris Shah's poetic talent is displayed here. There is deep pathos in his description of Heer when she learns that Dhido has come to rescue her in the guise of a fakir, taking to the life of a fakir being regarded by the Indian domestic code as the greatest disaster to visit man's life. The descriptions of women drawing water from a well, sitting at the spinning-wheel and going to pick cotton in the fields are superb indeed, but it looks as if the village of Rangpur is the land of women only. No men are anywhere in sight except a peasant who is given a violent treatment in a scuffle when he tries to rescue his wife from Ranjha's abuses and blows. Poor Saida going to invite him on bended knees to cure his wife who pretends she has been bitten by a snake is given a similar treatment.

Ranjha elopes with Heer from Rangpur, a course which he had spurned as immoral when Heer had asked him on the eve of her marriage to take her away while she was a maiden. Now the same man elopes with a wedded woman. There may be a suggestion of the irony of fate in this but the tenor of the story hardly warrants it. It is indeed a blind spot.

Waris Shah makes Ranjha and Heer go through the same tribulations when they are overtaken in their escapade from Rangpur by Heer's husband and party, as in all the earlier versions of the story.

But Waris Shah makes a further addition to the train of incidents. When the Raja of Kabula, called Adali or just by Waris

Shah, decides in favour of the lovers, Heer refuses to go with Ranjha to Takhat Hazara. She must go to her paternal home at Jhang Syal and Ranjha to Takhat Hazara from where he would bring the wedding party and be married to her with proper rites and ceremonies.

But Heer is poisoned to death at her father's home and when the news is carried to Ranjha in the midst of preparations to arrange a wedding party, he throws up his hands in despair and gives up his ghost.

Waris Shah's narrative is such a mixture of good and bad qualities that one despairs of pronouncing a critical judgement more because of the applause accorded to it from generation to generation by a people that have not travelled far from their unsophisticated and even crude taste.

Like all people of Sufi inclinations, Waris Shah is satirical about Mullas and Kazis, the spokesmen of the *Sharia* or legal code of Islam. Being a Sayyed of a priestly class accorded high status in Muslim society, like the Brahmin in Hindu society, he is full of contempt, and even hatred for the Jats, the dominant land-owning class in Punjabi society, both Hindu and Muslim. He holds them up to ridicule in words like the following:

> The Jat is a liar and his word is not to be trusted.

But for all his Sufi liberalism, Waris Shah does not take kindly to the political change that is taking place in the country which he describes as anarchy and disorder, in words such as:

> The high-born have been put to grief,
> The lowly peasants are on the spree.
> They have become lords of the land,
> New governments rise in every part.

2

In the next period of Sikh domination, the tone of Kissa-writing becomes less idealistic. The poets are more conscious of the patronage that they can expect from the new Sikh aristocracy. Their style of writing is more ornate, more extravagant and they look for more exotic subjects. The best of them, Hashim Shah (A.D. 1753–1823) gives proof of a more refined taste than that of Waris Shah. He is the author of Sassi Punnu, Shirin Farhad and Sohni Mahival.

Sassi Punnu

In the story as commonly narrated, Sassi is born in the house of a chief, known simply as Jam, the common title of the rulers of Sindh and neighbouring Kathiawad. An echo of the story of Puran Bhagat and many another myth and legend, an imprecation is pronounced on the infant by the astrologers. She is denounced as boding ill-omen for her father's house and deserving to be discarded. Parental affection, however, makes Jam get the infant ensconced in a casket in which a large amount of jewellery is deposited before it is cast on the water of the river to be floated to an unknown destination.

The floating casket is picked up downstream by a washerman, Ata Mohammed or simply Ata, who becomes extremely rich with the jewellery that is found in the casket. A palace and garden are constructed and the infant is brought up in a right royal manner.

As Sassi grows into womanhood, she happens to see the picture of the son of a merchant belonging to the Hot clan of the Baluchis who is named Punnu. She gets Punnu to be invited by her father and when Punnu comes and sees her, he vehemently responds to her love. Presumably some kind of wedding rites are performed so that Sassi entertains Punnu with the choicest foods and wines in her putative father's garden and goes to sleep with him. But Punnu's companions, afraid of losing him to the wiles of a rich heiress, pick him up from Sassi's side and take him back to their native place. On waking up Sassi finds that Punnu is not there in her bed; she is seized with despair and raves madly. According to the story as told by Hashim and others, she gets out of her father's palace to follow the track of Punnu's camel in the sand. There is no one to stop her except her mother, not heeding whose

protestations Sassi walks away on the sandy track and by mid-day finds herself amidst burning sands and dies. This is of course the weakest part of the story which is, even otherwise, much more disjointed than would appear from this summary.

For all this, the tale is told with great pathos and makes many a Punjabi reader regret Sassi's fate in great anguish.

Shirin Farhad

Hashim tries to better his performance in his next *Kissa* entitled *Shirin Farhad* which is taken from West Asian lore. Shirin is the daughter of the ruler of Syria (Sham) though Hashim gives his capital the name of Istambul, the account of which is grossly and inartistically exaggerated. A fresco painter painting the walls of the palace happens to see Shirin and falls in love with her so much that he covers the walls with portraits of Shirin herself! Learning of the youthful painter's infatuation for her, Shirin is also struck with love for him and tells her father of this love.

The king, seeking to get out of his dilemma, puts a condition before Farhad, asking him to carve out a canal from the mountains to irrigate his gardens. Farhad at once goes out and starts digging the mountains. After a great deal of labour, he despairs of striking water and kills himself with a blow of the adze on his forehead. As it happens, just at that moment a fountain gushes out of the mountains where he was operating. Shirin, coming to know of her lover's death at the moment of undreamt of success, is struck with remorse and kills herself. Again it must be said the poet makes a poor hash of the story.

Sohni Mahival

Sohni Mahival is another story filled with the same kind of exaggerations and improbabilities. Izzat Beg, a young merchant of distant Bukhara, crosses the Khyber in the course of a caravan and on his way to Delhi, stays for rest for a few days in the town of Gujrat on the bank of the Jhelam, a town which cannot afford much promise of a profit to a rich trader of foreign merchandise. Here he sees the beautiful daughter of a potter, whose name Sohni also means beautiful, as he goes to buy some earthenware in the town. Thereafter he makes a practice of visiting the shop daily and buying earthenware from the shop at a high price and

selling them elseware at a loss. When his companions find him hopelessly involved and intractable, they leave him to his fate and return to their native Bukhara.

Izzat Beg, denuded of all his wealth, contrives in the end to get himself employed as a cattleherd in Sohni's father's house and succeeds in winning Sohni's love. When the love intrigue comes to be known to Sohni's father, he marries her off. However, Izzat Beg who has now come to be known as Mahival or cattleherd goes to find the same kind of employment at Sohni's husband's. There also the secret comes to be known and he is dismissed.

Now he becomes a fakir and puts up a hut to live in on the farther bank of the river. Sohni takes to going to him secretly at night when Mahival crosses the river to receive her on the nearest bank. After some time Sohni offers to cross the river herself on a pitcher to come to her lover's hut. The stratagem also comes to be known to Sohni's sister-in-law who goes one night to the river bank, picks up the baked pitcher and replaces it with an unbaked one. Next night as Sohni picks up the unbaked pitcher to swim upon, the pitcher disintegrates in the water of the stream and Sohni gets drowned.

This is a story presenting another aspect of the Muslim invaders' view of the whole process of the invasion and conquest of India, the sacrifices made by the merchant class among the invaders for the people of India.

Hashim, or for that matter, the other Kissa-writers following him lack the literary and creative skill to deal with such a story and it becomes a crude and sketchy folk-tale in their hands.

Hashim has written a couple of hundred couplets of a didactic nature, which make better reading than his romances.

Ahmed Yar

Another prominent poet of this period is Ahmed Yar, who was born in A.D. 1768 in the village of Islamgarh, in Gujrat district (now in Pakistan). He has written about thirty-five Kissas of which some like 'Yusuf Zuleikha', 'Laila Majnu' and 'Hatimtai' are from West Asian lore, 'Kam Roop' from Medieval Indian and 'Heer Ranjha', 'Sohni Mahival' and 'Sassi Punnu' from the native lore, and various other accounts of historical and legendary tales of the Muslim tradition.

It would be interesting to observe that of all Punjabi writers of yesterday, Ahmed Yar alone was a professional man of letters, though he depended for support on the patronage of the aristocracy of his time, and not of a large reading public. His verse is traditional in both metre and imagery, and his diction has a much greater mixture of Arabic and Persian in it than the diction of any other Punjabi poet preceding him. He was called Maulvi in deference to his learning in Islamic lore and perhaps he knew Arabic as well as Persian.

His poetry lacks the popular tinge which Waris Shah and Hashim Shah's poetry possesses. It seems he was trying to evolve a literary style of Punjabi that should appeal to the educated and sophisticated sections of Punjabis. It would be reasonable to say that if the British had not conquered Punjab and introduced Urdu in schools, Punjabi language and literature might have developed on the lines laid down by Ahmed Yar.

Kadir Yar

Kadir Yar was born in the village of Machhi Ke (now in the Sheikhpura district of Pakistan) in A.D. 1805. A Jat of the Sandhu clan, he was educated enough to write *Mairaj Name* (account of the ascension of the Prophet). A specimen is given below:

> The Prophet sat on a gem-studded chair most comfortably,
> The same in size and form as when he lived on this earth.
> His body clad in a dress of light, a turban of
> light on his head,
> On the throne of glory sat the lord of all the worlds.

His narrative of the story of Sohni Mahival in the form of double couplets is also in a refined style compared with the narration of the same story by other poets coming before and after him. Another of his writing of a religious intent is Rozanama (account of fasts) in which he has described the thirty days of fasting as a month of separation of the devotee from the Prophet Mohammed.

However, his more popular writings are an account of the legend of Puran Bhagat and that of the death of Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa in the battle of Jamrud across the Khyber Pass, both in *Siharfi* form. They are so lacking in literary refinement as to cast doubt whether the *Mairaj Nama* and *Sohni Mahival* are his writings or of another poet of the same name.

Amam Baksh

Another Kissa-writer of note to have lived during the last years of Sikh rule and the early years of British rule is Amam Baksh (A.D. 1778–1863). He lived in the village Passian Wala in Sialkot district, now in Pakistan. He deserves credit for introducing many stories from West Asian life like *Shah Bahram*, *Malikzada*, *Badi-uj-Jamal*, *Shah Pari* and *Ibrahim Adham Balkhi*, apart from a story of mixed origin, *Chander Badan*. The versification is on the lines of Hashim Shah and Ahmed Yar, but simpler and more straightforward. Of these stories *Shah Bahram* is the best known.

The hero, Bahram Gor, is the ruler of Iraq. He falls in love with a *pari*, Husn Banu, who is kept in custody by a demon, Safaid Deo (the White Demon). Shah Bahram by a stratagem, equally incredible, kills the demon and liberates Husn Banu and then marries her.

The story is a curious medley of events and characters natural and supernatural, the latter predominating on the whole.

Chander Badan is another story imported into Punjabi by this poet. *Laila Majnu* is yet another Kissa of the poet in which he has made a tour de force of pathos.

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3

Among other writers that take the Kissa tradition forward to the end of the 19th century are Joga Singh and Kishan Singh both writers of the story of Heer and Ranjha. Krishan Singh's verse is *doha* after Pilu's Mirza Sahiban suitable for a special style of singing to the accompaniment of Sarangi and Dhad. He has written a Kissa of Shirin Farhad also together with several other legends.

Joga Singh has given an Indian colour to his story of Heer and Ranjha. The verse form is the classical Kabit. Whereas some of the earlier Muslim poets end the story by sending Heer and Ranjha to Mecca, he sends them to *Swarga* (heaven) where gods give them an ovation.

Fazal Shah (1828–1890)

Fazal Shah who was born in Nava Kot, Lahore and was a Daftari in one of the court-rooms is the most famous and prolific Kissa writers of his period, having written the Kissas of Yusuf Zuleikha and Laila Majnu from the Muslim tradition and Sassi Punnu and Sohni Mahival from the Indo-Punjabi tradition. With considerable grounding in Persian and Arabic, he has overloaded his diction with Persian and Arabic words of which he shows uncommon mastery. His special weakness, which was considered a strong point in his time, is the excessive use of alliteration. Of his Kissas, Sohni Mahival has proved the most popular. In fact, like Waris Shah's version of Heer and Hashim Shah's version of Sassi Punnu, Fazal Shah's version of Sohni Mahival is considered of a very high standard.

Mohammed Buta Gujrati (1836–1919)

Mohammed Buta Gujrati, though better known for his didactic and Islamic historical poems, has written numerous Kissas also such as Mirza Sahiban, Sassi Punnu, Sohni Mahival, Roda Jalali, Yusuf Zuleikha, Shirin Farhad, and Sultan Mahmood. His Kissa of Mirza Sahiban is written in *bait* form, famous for its use by Waris Shah in Heer Ranjha. It has given the story a more reflective and sober colour.

Bhagwan Singh (1850–1902)

Bhagwan Singh born in the village of Marajh, now in district Bhatinda, has given the story of Heer a popular rural colour characteristic of the Malwa or the southern region of Punjab. It is written in the classical Kabit form in the Hindu tradition. Sohni Mahival and Mirza Sahiban are two of his other Kissas besides which he has written many popular stories in verse-form.

Mian Ghulam Rasul

Mian Ghulam Rasul of Dasuha in the present district of Hoshiarpur is another comparatively better educated writer of Punjabi verse. Of his two Kissas Yusuf Zuleikha is in the classical Muslim tradition, full of metaphors, similes and alliterations and Sassi Punnu is in *bait* form. He is more famous, perhaps, for his *Chithian* and *Siharfian.*

Mohammed Baksh

Mohammed Baksh of Tehlum, born about A.D. 1831, has earned a name for his Kissa entitled *Saiful Maluk*, which is again a story from West Asia. It is a voluminous work of one thousand nine hundred and twenty-eight long stanzas. A mixture of Arabic-Persian words and description of the beauty of rural women are its main characteristics.

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6

Ballads of War and Strife

Next to the stories of love come ballads of war and strife as significant works of medieval Punjabi poetry. From as early times as the emergence of the Punjabi language in folk tradition, ballads and lays of work and strife have been sung by professional bards for the entertainment of rajas and jagirdars as well as gatherings of common people at fairs and on festive occasions like weddings and birthday celebrations. The earliest references to such lays and ballads are found in the *Guru Granth*.

The most commonly sung lays of this period are the *vars* of Dulla Bhatti and Jaimal Fatta (Patta). The first celebrates the bravery of Dulla Bhatti, leader of a small tribal community in one of the waste lands called Sandal Bar, which is now a prosperous district of Faizulpur in Pakistan. It was a family of marauders who are said to have carried their activities far enough to have looted on occasion state detachments carrying revenue and booty. Dulla's father Farid is reputed to have looted one such party during the reign of Akbar the Great, for which he was caught and executed along with his chief companions, and their stuffed skins hung on the gates of Lahore. As the story goes, actuated by his royal generosity, Akbar employed Dulla's mother, Ladhi, to suckle his eldest son, Salim, who was later to succeed him as Jahangir. Dulla is said to have lived in the royal palace with his mother, and regarded as his foster-brother by Salim. Ladhi returned to her native place Pindi Bhattian, when Salim was old enough. Dulla grew in his native place, nurturing feelings of hatred and animosity towards the royal house, clean forgetting the affection that he may have received as a child. As he stepped into youth, he resumed his marauding activities, as a true son of his father. A punitive expedition was led against him and he was caught and executed

in his turn. The lay or *var* of Dulla Bhatti celebrates Dulla's marauding activities and his unequal fight against the royal force sent to suppress him.

It has been sung with gusto more in central Punjab perhaps than in Dulla's native country. Some sections in Pakistan today have begun to make more than proportionate amends by elevating him to the rank of a rebel against Akbar's rule. The lay has been composed in verse-form specifically for tales of heroism. One such version is attributed to Bishan Singh (19th century).

The *var* of Jaimal and Fatta celebrates the bravery and sacrifice of two warriors of the Marwar State of Rajputs. They resist Emperor Akbar's expedition to take charge of the child-heir of Raja Jaswant Singh. The *var* is sung commonly by popular bards and does not seem to be available in any authentic printed version.

Another famous *var* pertains to a later period when Nadir Shah, the emperor of Iran, invaded India. It was first reduced to writing by Pandit Hari Krishan Kaul, who was for some time the Chief Minister of Patiala State.

The subject matter of the lay is the battle of Karnal and no mention is made of the massacre of Delhi. Perhaps it was not necessary to take the version to that gory conclusion. Moreover, Pandit Hari Krishan Kaul may have been able to get from the popular bards an account up to that point only. From the mention of the author's name at two places, it is attributed to one Nijabat, a Muslim Rajput of the Kharal clan of the village of Matila Kharalan in the district of Shahpur, now in Pakistan.

Nijabat is considered to have lived in the 19th century, but the account is so authentic in detail and feeling that it may be a version available with the bards reduced to writing later with some refinements by Nijabat.

The use of the traditional protagonists Kala and Narad as watching the holocaust and making their comments is a typically classical Indian form, which fact militates against a Muslim of West Punjab having been its original writer, and strengthens the view that the author was a practitioner of the classical form and even a Hindu, or at least a Mirasi only nominally a Muslim but professionally grounded in classical Indian conventions. The language also is more central than western Punjabi.

Through the conventional quarrel of Kala and Narad, the author mentions the court intrigues at Delhi being responsible for inviting

Nadir Shah to invade the country projecting Nizam-ul-Mulk as the chief villain.

An interesting feature of this lay is that it has no hero, there are only villains, among its characters; Nadir Shah is not idealised or praised anywhere. In fact, the author has described the Iranian soldiers as ugly savages and presented Mohammed Shah Rangila, the emperor of Delhi, as a boastful idiot, who talked of razing the fort of Kandhar to dust.

Other lays of this period are the one by an unknown author celebrating Guru Gobind Singh's battle of Chamkaur, in which his two elder sons, Ajit Singh and Jujhar Singh, fought and died heroically. Yet another by one Tekibhan which is called Kahn Bhagwan Di Var celebrates the death of Raja Kansa at the hands of his nephew Krishna whom he had wanted to destroy. In this lay Krishna is not presented as destroying Kansa by a miracle but as a fighter at the head of a handful of cavalry.

A better-known lay is that of Haqiqat Rai by Agra, whose dates and places of birth and death are not known. As mentioned in one place in the text Agra was a Sethi Khatri. According to Maula Bakhsh Kushta, this lay was written in about A.D. 1790.

It is an extensive account of Haqiqat Rai's martyrdom for his religion in consequence of a quarrel with his Muslim fellow-students in a mosque school at Sialkot. The Muslim boy made uncomplimentary remarks against the Hindu goddess, Lakshmi Devi. Haqiqat Rai retaliated by maligning Prophet Mohammed's daughter, Bibi Fatima. Haqiqat Rai, a boy of about sixteen years, was the son of a Hindu official. When he was arrested, all the respectable local Hindus, even those occupying high positions in the Mughal administration, like Dewan Dhanpat Rai of Aminabad, wanted to get his case referred to the Governor of Lahore. There high Hindu officials like Dewan Surat Singh failed in their intercession to save the boy from execution. The story is not that of any war or battle, but of unusual heroism shown by the boy's undaunted stand against the oppressive Mughal regime. This story has lately come to be cherished by the Hindus of the Punjab for placing a Hindu boy at par with numerous *Kesha dhari* Sikhs who earned such martyrdom for heroically upholding their beliefs in those days.

A celebrated lay of a later date is that by Pir Mohammed. It describes the battle between Maharaja Ranjit Singh's father Maha Singh against the Muslim Chatha Sardar Ghulam Mohammed.

A peculiar fact about this lay is that the author's sympathies are with the Chathas who are defeated by Maha Singh. Ghulam Mohammed ascribes Maha Singh's victory as much to Maha Singh's deceitful trick as to his military prowess. It is composed in the heroic Nishani Chhand. Its diction is colloquial but smart and full of movement.

Two lays of the wars of the Sikh period that have achieved literary distinction are Kadir Yar's lay about Hari Singh Nalva's victory over the Afghans at Jamrud, for which however, he had to pay with his life. It consists of two *Siharfis* in *bait* form, and is full of admiration for Hari Singh Nalva's valour. It commemorates an important trend of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's policy of expansion in the north-west.

The second presents an account, sympathetic but shot with irony and regret, for the impending fall of the powerful Sikh kingdom so soon after the death of its builder. Written in 1847 by Shah Mohammed after the first and before the second Anglo-Sikh War of 1848, it seeks consolation in the fact that God will repair the damage suffered by the kingdom owing to the treachery of Rani Jindan. The poet puts all the blame for the defeat of the Khalsa army on Rani Jindan's shoulders and as per the practice in the feudal set-up, condemns all womanhood as responsible for dynastic and national disasters. Says he:

> From time immemorial women have been the agents of evil.
> Ravana, the king of Lanka met with disaster through a woman.
> The Kauravas and Pandavas met with the same fate
> because of a woman
> When eighteen hosts were sent to perdition.
>
> Says Shah Mohammed, this Rani Jind Kaur has
> razed to the ground
> The mighty edifice of the country's government.

However, since the kingdom was not yet annexed to the British Empire in India, and the minor Maharaja Dalip Singh was recognised as ruler though after substantial reduction in his territory, Shah Mohammed expresses the hope:

> God willing, he will set right through his kindness
> Matters that have gone awry with the Singhs

There is great community of interests between
Hindus and Muslims
They are not concerned with the foreigner,
Who does not speak his mind to anybody
And feels big in his inflated ego.
Says Shah Mohammed, son of the merchant
who had amassed great wealth,
Has become just an agent.

Shah Mohammed

Shah Mohammed belonged to the village of Vadala Viram and was born in about A.D. 1780 in a Qureshi family whose members had been officials and Qazis in Mughal times and was related to an artillery officer Sultan Mahmood of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's army.

The lay is a brief account of happenings in the kingdom after Maharaja Ranjit Singh's death up to the defeat of the Khalsa army in 1846. The poet speaks with anger of the anarchy that prevailed in the kingdom which he describes in these words:

Note how the ruffians have spread dark disorder;
They killed whoever sat on the throne.

Either through discretion or out of ignorance, Shah Mohammed makes no mention of Rani Jindan appointed chief minister, Raja Lal Singh, who was still in favour of the British and was indeed invested with the title of Raja formally by the young Maharaja Dalip Singh under instructions from the British Resident. He throws hints at the treachery of General Teja Singh who was also given the title of Raja even though Dalip Singh refused to sign the order of conferment. About Gulab Singh's conduct of affairs after the Khalsa army's defeat on the banks of the Sutlej, he writes:

Rode out Raja Gulab Singh on his own
And led by hand the British General to Lahore.
"Be kind to us, Sahib," he said
and successfully accomplished his own purpose,
The soldiery of Malwa and Doaba was disbanded
And he sent home the Dogra army on the sly.
Says Shah Mohammed, having secured for
himself the territory of Kashmir
He marched his army to Jammu side.

Some of the observations made by Shah Mohammed are very revealing indeed. For instance, he mentions Rani Jindan having written secretly to the British:

> You occupy first our lands across the Sutlej,
> And they (the army) will march against you in anger.
> Only those will fight who are ignorant of the state of affairs;
> The Sardars will not pitch themselves against you.
> For this reason have I sowed disunity in the army;
> Some will make retreat all of a sudden.
> Says Shah Mohammed your armies, O Lord
> Will relieve me of my involvements.

The word that Shah Mohammed uses for involvements '*taqaza*', means also a woman's jewellery and the irony in its use in this verse is obvious.

To cut the story short, this *var* of Shah Mohammed fills the Sikh mind with anguish to this day and is cherished by the Sikhs almost as a sacred text.

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Classical Indian Legends

Indian legends and romances in Punjabi are in a class by themselves. These have been sung in public and private assemblies from quite old times but only a few were available in written form upto the year A.D. 1900. One such romance is that of Kam Roop and Kam Lata written by Ahmed Yar. It is the story of a prince who sees the vision of a beautiful princess of Singladip in a dream. Then against the advice of his parents and elders, he insists on going out in search of the princess. In this expedition he has to cross the seas on a boat along with some companions. Arriving at the capital, he wanders into the royal gardens, where he catches a glimpse of the princess and falls unconscious. On learning of this, the princess comes to where he is lying. As soon as she sees him, she is also stricken with love. After numerous hard trials and vicissitudes, the lovers are united in marriage.

But the most popular romance of this category is Puran Bhagat by Kadir Yar. It is written in the form of two *Siharfis* in *bait* measure. The story is embedded in the Punjabi mind from time immemorial and its theme is almost universal, having parallels in ancient Greek

and some languages of antiquity. The old king Salwahan of a place which may be identified as Sialkot (at least Kadir did so), happening to see a beautiful young woman of the Chamar caste, Luna, marries her, even though he has already a wife of his own age, Icchran and a son by her called Puran. Puran was sent on his birth to be brought up in a cell because astrologers had predicted that it would be inauspicious for the king to see his face till he grew up to the age of twelve. Luna is brought as a wife by the king towards the end of Puran's term in the cell, so that she is still childless when he comes out of his internship. Having highly delighted his mother's heart, he is sent to pay his respects to Luna, his step-mother.

But when Luna sees him, she is seized by passion and will have no filial respects from him. She makes open advances to him which he dutifully rejects.

This throws Luna into a rage and she decides to take her revenge by falsely accusing Puran of trying to outrage her modesty.

The king is naturally furious over this and oversteps paternal instinct by ordering Puran to be cut to pieces and thrown in the wasteland for vultures to feed on him.

The executioners are kinder, however, they lower him down into a dry well, to await whatever fate is in store for him.

A band of yogis, headed by the legendary Gorakh Nath passing by, is drawn to the well by the cries of the youth. Puran is brought out and taken by Gorakh Nath into his care.

For twelve years more Luna remains childless. And to add to it, such a drought sweeps over the kingdom that even the royal gardens go dry and wither.

Then one day when a band of yogis comes to rest in those gardens, suddenly every tree and plant goes green again.

The Raja, hearing of this marvel, comes with both his queens to pay homage to the yogi. As soon as Icchran sees the yogi Puran's face, milk oozes out of her breasts and she takes him in her embrace. Luna is penitent and confesses her guilt. When Puran would not come back to his father's palace, he begs Puran to give a boon to Luna so that she may have a son. Puran gives her a grain of wheat and departs.

In due course, Luna gives birth to a son who grows up to become Rasalu, the romantic hero of many Punjabi legends.

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7

Prose

The earliest available works of prose are the Janam Sakhis, or life stories of Guru Nanak. The most authentic of these, called *Puratan Janam Sakhi*, is considered to have been written between A.D. 1620 and 1640. Its language is based on the dialect of the country between the Chenab and the Attock.

Another Janam Sakhi is that attributed to Bhai Bidhi Chand, a valiant disciple of the sixth Guru, Har Govind, written in A.D. 1640. Another of about the same time is that by Sodhi Mehrban, son of Guru Arjan Dev's elder brother, who himself claimed to be the Guru.

There are some other *Sakhis* of a miscellaneous kind. The most popular so far, however, is that called *Bhai Bale Wali*, which was regarded up to the beginning of the 20th century as the most authentic and to have been written according to the wishes of the second Guru, Guru Angad. But a textual analysis reveals it to be a work of a time as late as of Guru Gobind Singh. Its language leans more towards the central dialect. The analysis further gives a clue about its authorship; it is believed to have been written by a devotee of Hindal of Jandiala Guru near Amritsar.

These *Sakhis* are in fact hagiographies. They are based wholly on the tradition that had been built around Guru Nanak in the century after his death. They are written as a concatenation of anecdotes about Guru Nanak's life, gathered from word of mouth, coming from one generation to another, from hearsay or even invented to fit Guru Nanak's compositions or according to what the writers believed best to prove the divinity of Guru Nanak. The Guru is presented in them as a divine being from his very birth and every action of his is interpreted as revealing his divinity and conveying his teachings. Almost every anecdote partakes of the

nature of a miracle. Factually, the information available from them is hardly more than that of Guru Nanak's date and place of birth, his parentage, his marriage and progeny consisting of two sons; a sister and her husband who was an official at Sultanpur Lodhi; of Guru Nanak having been taken in the employ of the governor as a store-keeper where he remained only for a short period, and lastly of Guru Nanak's settlement in old age at the village of Kartarpur, on the bank of the Ravi, his death in A.D. 1539 and nomination of a disciple Lehna as his successor with the name of Guru Angad.

The language of the *Sakhis* is full of domestic sweetness, feelings of tender devotion towards the hero and an urbanity which can be acquired only by a long discipline of religious sanctity and of other moral and spiritual virtues. The syntax is simple; rarely is a complex or even compound sentence used. It inspires indeed a subtle wonder for the great personage whose actions are being described.

Other prose works of that time are some Goshtis and dialogues between Guru Nanak and his contemporaries like Ajita Randhawa and Budha Randhawa and supernatural entities like Kali Yuga and Narinkar, or mythical or semi-mythical personages like Raja Janak of ancient India or Gorakh or other siddhas of the medieval period, or Karun (Croesus) of ancient West Asia.

There are some other works of a religious intent, a few of which are translations from Vedic and Puranic lore and some that are attributed probably falsely to Guru Nanak himself and even to Sheikh Farid. They are very much like the Janam Sakhis in style and spirit.

In the next hundred years the most important of prose writings are those attributed to Bhai Mani Singh, a disciple and close companion of Guru Gobind Singh who died a martyr in A.D. 1737 as priest of the central Sikh temple, Hari Mandir, at Amritsar. Of these one known as *Gian Ratanawali* is an elaboration of the first *var* of Bhai Gurudas containing anecdotes from the life of Guru Nanak and other Gurus and the second *Bhagat Ratanawali* or Bhagat Mala that relates anecdotes from the life of the Bhaktas mentioned in Bhai Gurudas's eleventh *var*. The language and style of these works show a strong influence of Braj Bhasha, a trend in the writings of the Sikhs that had set in probably from the time of Guru Gobind Singh himself.

Another highly esteemed work of this period is Prem Samarga. It is believed by many to be a work of Guru Gobind Singh himself. But inner evidence shows it to be only a work of some Sikh disciple of the Guru. It narrates the way daily life is to be lived by a virtuous person, particularly a Sikh.

Parchian Dasan Patshahian Dian (Papers relating to the ten Gurus) is a composition of the end of the 18th century considered to be that of Sant Sewa Dass Udasi. Another Sikh of the Udasi order Bhai Addan Shah wrote a translation of the famous Persian text, *Kimia-I-Saadat*, under the name of *Paras Bhag*.

Another composition of this period is Malwa Des Rattan di Sakhi (Story of the Travels in the Malwa Region). It gives an account of the travel of Guru Teg Bahadur and Guru Gobind Singh in the region south of the Sutlej called Malwa. Its language is simple with a tinge of the Malvai dialect and is comparatively free from Braj Bhasha. It generally praises this region for having been the scene of the activity of these two Gurus.

Another text of these times is one entitled *Pakki Roti*, which seems to be a work of some Mohammedan author of the west Punjab region. It recounts the way of life prescribed for a Muslim.

The trend among the Sikhs towards Braj Bhasha militated against the writing of Punjabi by both Hindus and Sikhs. Not to speak of prose, even verse written in this period cannot be considered Punjabi writing. One prose work of this period, known as *Akbar Nama*, offers, however, an instance of genuine Punjabi prose. It purports to be a translation of the Persian *Akbar Nama*. Another Punjabi translation in the genuinely Punjabi style is that of *Adle Akbari*.

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8

Didactic and Devotional Poetry

Apart from Sheikh Farid's work and poetry of the Gurmat tradition, there is some verse available of a didactic and devotional nature by other writers also. Sikh tradition tells us when Guru Arjan Dev was compiling the *Granth Sahib*, it became known that he was including in it also the works of various Hindu and Muslim Bhaktas. Besides the Sikh scriptures, some other sadhus and fakirs presented their compositions to the Guru for his consideration for inclusion. Among them the four named in this tradition are Shah Husain, Pilu, Kanha and Chhaju.

But the work of none of them was considered acceptable by the Guru for inclusion in the *Granth*. It was felt that they were mainly escapist and not in keeping with the spirit of *Gurubani* which does not preach resignation from worldly duties but regards *Grihastha* or family life as the best *Ashram* or institution of life.

Of these persons, Shah Husain's work has been considered in the chapter on Sufi poetry. Pilu's work, the *Kissa* of Mirza Saheban, has also been considered in the chapter on *Kissa* poetry. However, there are references to the quality of Pilu's verse that seem to distinguish him from other *Kissa* writers:

> He was blessed by the five Pirs who placed their hand
> on his shoulder.

Another such reference was made by Ahmed Yar:

> Nobody can equal Pilu,
> A great faqir had indeed looked at him with an ecstatic eye.

There are, indeed, some verses by Pilu, that justify this praise:

> In this age of Kali, fire rages on all sides,
> Falsehood weighs heavy like a five-seer weight
> While truthful words weigh but a *masha*.

Virtue is hard to find anywhere, while vice flows in streams.

O Lord, Pilu is a beggar at Thy door and Thou art the ocean.

Kanha is a poet of a very indifferent quality. But some of his verses show a commendable boldness, in which vein, he says:

By what kind of devotion (Bhakti) wilt Thou *be attained*
I ask nothing else of Thee.
Some people perform austerities to obtain kingdoms,
I do not ask any kingdom of Thee.
Those who practise charities to go to paradise;
I do not ask for a paradise of Thee.
He who seeks Thee in himself finds Thee.
Kanha says there is no distance between Thee and that which resides within me.

Nama, a contemporary and devotee of Guru Tegh Bahadur, has also written beautiful verses in *Kafi* form, which are instinct with devotion towards the Guru. There is an element of personal love towards the Guru, the like of which Bulhe Shah had for his preceptor Shah Inayat. Another *Bhakta* poet of the same period whose verse is known for its wit and humour is Jalhan. Some of his humorous verses have become proverbial quotations:

I grazed cattle as a lad, and ploughed the fields as I grew up,
I told the beads in old age, and thus answered God's complaint.

People have bead-strings, Jalhan has a rope;
Telling beads all his life he has not snatched even a hair of the Divine.

Wajid, whose dates may be somewhat later, is well known for his mixture of *Vedanta* and Sufi philosophy. He was a resident of Jalandhar. In a very famous poem he has sung about the inscrutability of the ways of God in simple and rustic idiom which produces a poignant effect:

Some have sons, and sons of the sons
Some have daughters and sons of the daughters.
To some, only one child is born, and he too dies soon
Says Wajid, who can ask the Lord to do this, and not that?

Some do not relish butter, sugar and fine flour,
Wealth comes to them in heaps upon heaps,
Others do not get saltless greens to fill their bellies,
Wajid, who can ask the Lord to do this and not that?

Sikhs of the Nirmala Order are well known for their writings of a Vedantic colour. The best known of these is Pandit Gulab Singh (A.D. 1736–1799). He has written much, but being a scholar of both Sanskrit and Persian, his verse has an erudite tone. He writes, indeed, in a language that is more Braji than Punjabi. His best known works, which were popular till the end of the 19th century when the writers of the Singh Sabha persuasion like Giani Dit Singh and Bhai Vir Singh displaced them, are: *Adhyatma Ramayana, Bhava Rasa Amrit, Mokha Panth,* and *Prabodh Chandra Natak.*

Budh Singh (A.D. 1710–1780) of the same order has not written much but his language is genuine Punjabi.

Two such poets of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's time may also be noticed in this context. Hakim Singh 'Darvesh' born and bred in the village of Raipur, now in Ludhiana district, is said to have written seventeen books of verse. His view of love is idealistic and romantic in the Sufi way:

He who has a longing for the beloved should strive to live up to his love.
He should hold his life on the palm of his hand and never retrace his footsteps.
He should bear the stings and darts of the world, not let the thread of devotion break.
Says Hakim Singh, he should not lose his heart, but keep his eyes fixed on the face of his beloved.

Another poet Sain Dass has written in the same strain with a didactic bent of mind:

Those who appear to you as your near and dear ones, are there for a few days
Those whom you love intensely, don't count them as of much use to you.
Says Sain Dass, this world is a false show
You have to leave it today or tomorrow.

In the second half of the 19th century, the alienation of the people's mind from this world is forcefully expressed by *sadhus* of

the period. Sadhu Ishar Dass has written various forms of verse like *kafi*, *bara maha* and *ghazal* but the tone remains that of withdrawal from the world:

> You have forgotten the Lord, and walk with a swagger.
> You fatten yourself with liquor and roast mutton
> You are yourself the goat meant for the angel of death.
> This world offers you shelter for a few days,
> But you build mansions and palaces to live in.
> Says Ishar Dass, understand, my dear friend,
> In the end you will only mingle with dust.

Moti Ram, perhaps, a disciple of Ishar Dass, strikes the same note in his verse:

> Queens and princesses in their harems,
> pay so much attention to their hair-do;
> Whose throats are sweet like the *koels*,
> and whose speech is winsomely beautiful,
> whose faces are like the moon,
> Which they adorn with jewellery.
> Like pigeons they playfully forget
> The death that hovers on their heads.

9

The Modern Period

The Pre-moderns

India can be said to have entered the modern age with the advent of the British on this subcontinent. The Punjab was annexed in 1848. Until then it remained impervious in its cultural life to British and European influences except that Maharaja Ranjit Singh had begun to organize his army on European lines and even employed European, French, Italian and German officers to train the army with a view to improving its fighting quality. Otherwise, Ranjit Singh did not allow even European missionaries to build a church anywhere in his kingdom, far from allowing them to introduce English education. A chronicler, Hashmat Ali, remarks that the Sikh rulers did not build any pucca roads for fear of providing facilities of transport in the not quite unlikely event of an invasion by the British Company's army.

However, the British missionaries had set up quarters in Ludhiana in the third decade of the 19th century, some twenty years before the British conquest of the Punjab. They had started preparing a grammar of the Punjabi language and translating the Bible into Punjabi. Even the first, more or less authentic history of the Sikhs was written by Ratan Singh Bhangu, a grandson of the famous Sikh martyr Mahtab Singh in 1840, on commission by Mr. Murray, the East India Company's agent at Ludhiana.

The first notable contribution to Punjabi literature which can be called modern in the history of the Sikh kingdom was *Sikhan De Raj di Vithia* (An Account of Sikh Rule) written by Sharda Ram Philauri, a Brahmin munshi in the British residency, again on commission. He wrote also a less literary booklet, *Punjabi Baat Chit* (Conversation in Punjabi) as a text for British officers wanting to learn Punjabi. These were written in 1875. The *Baat Chit* is of little

significance today. It purports to give specimens of Punjabi dialects spoken in different districts of the Punjab. But it is not linguistically quite correct. The real significance as a work of Punjabi prose attaches to the *Vithia*. Sharda Ram's account is quite trustworthy about facts but he has inevitably a slant in favour of the British. As regards facts, he is mischievous and cynical enough to say that Guru Nanak had besides his wife, Mata Sulakhni, a mistress by the name of Mata Majh. About Ranjit Singh's first marriage to the daughter of the Kanhai Rani Sada Kaur, he says "Ranjit Singh got married to the daughter of a widow Sada Kaur," without mentioning the political and family status of the Rani. Otherwise the account is written in fairly good prose in the modern idiom, but for the fact that the influence of the dialect of Jalandhar district is marked. On the whole it can be truly called the first work in modern Punjabi prose.

Besides the translations of the gospels from the Bible, a Punjabi translation of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* was also brought out by the Ludhiana mission. Another novel of that period, translated from the Bengali, has recently been discovered. It is entitled *Jyotir Uday* (The Birth of Light). It is a hagiographical account of the birth and death of Jesus Christ. Baily's grammar of the Punjabi language is also worth mentioning as a pioneer effort.

The most detailed and authentic history of the Sikhs was written in Punjabi by Giani Gian Singh in four volumes towards the end of the 19th century, some parts of which may have overflowed into the 20th century. It is titled *Tawarikh Khalsa*. He belonged to the sect of Nirmalas, who are generally well-versed in *Pauranik* lore mostly in Braji language. But his Punjabi in the *Tawarikh* is singularly free of Braj idiom and vocabulary. The refinement of the Punjabi language in his case may be owing to his learning as a sadhu which helped him overcome the tendency to load his language with Malvai words and idioms, for Giani Gian Singh belonged to the Malva region, being a descendant of the famous Bhai Mani Singh who died a martyr to the Sikh cause in 1733.

Bihari Lal Puri is another writer of prose during the period, writing mostly for students of Punjabi in schools, famous among whose works are *Vidya Ratnakar* (Treasure of Knowledge), *Chitravali* (A Pageant of Pictures) and *Anek Darshan* (Varying Scenes). He wrote also a Punjabi grammar and a book on Punjabi prosody. There is a slight trace of Braji in his language.

Bhai Dit Singh (1853–1901) was one of the foremost leaders of the Singh Sabha Movement which gave an effective fillip to writing in Punjabi towards the end of the 19th century. He was for some time a teacher of Punjabi in the University Oriental College at Lahore and also for some time edited a Punjabi weekly, *The Khalsa*, again from Lahore. He was primarily a Singh Sabha reformer who fought against the old Brahmanical and folksy modes of worship that had crept into the practice and ritual of the Sikhs. His writings include *Niti Prakash* (A Light on Morals), *Gurumat Arati Prabodh* (Worship according to the Guru's Canon), *Damb Vidar* (The Dispensor of Pretence) and *Guga Safoura* (The Serpent Saint). He has also written a polemic between Swami Dayanand, whom he calls a sadhu, and himself. There is a strong influence of Braji in his writings.

Dr. Charan Singh (1853–1908), one of the founders of the Singh Sabha Movement, is perhaps the most eminent of Punjabi writers of the late 19th century. Unlike the writers mentioned above who wrote with purposes other than purely literary, Dr. Charan Singh's writings had primarily a literary motivation. His prose writings include *Maharani Sharab Kaur, Jang Marauli, Hir Bhai Gurudas* and *Bani Beora*. The last is a descriptive index of *Gurubani*.

Dr. Charan Singh has also written some verses and his translation of Kalidas's *Shakuntalam* remains the most authentic version to this day.

Maharani Sharabi Kaur, as its title indicates, is a satire on drinking which was the foremost of the addictions of the Sikh aristocracy and peasantry. A specimen:

> Just like Maharani Sharabi Kaur is her minister Tobacco; if the Rani is an evil spirit perched on an acacia tree, her prime minister is the evil spirit of the fields. The craving for liquor is bad but that for Tobacco is worse.... Liquor will at least fill the stomach but Tobacco does not leave even its ash in the mouth.
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Modernity in Punjabi Literature

In so far as Punjabi writing is concerned, 'modernity' is conterminous with the term 'contemporary'; they are co-extensive in range.

In the not too long span of a few decades, the mainstream of modernity in Punjabi literature has changed a number of colours; what was modern (*adhunik*) as distinguished from the traditional in the early part of the century was frowned at as reactionary by the Progressives in the thirties. And those who would not identify themselves with the commitments of the Progressives later styled themselves as New (*navin*) or Forward (*agragami*) or Experimentalists (*prayogvadi*). The Angry Young Man of today has rejected them all; he is throwing overboard, one after another, all the values dear to his elders.`

All these are different phases of modernity. The writing which refuses to conform to tradition is modern; though what is modern today may be spurned as traditional tomorrow. Modernity is a relative term. It signifies a departure from the past and means essentially the projection of contemporary values. Like fashion, the modern need not be new in character; it may be a cyclic recurrence of a familiar pattern. Like fashion, the modern may also not be an improvement on the prevalent; it may be a nostalgic attempt at revivalism. The modern in the realm of creative writing is that which reflects the modern man: his loves, his frustrations, his longings, his aspirations. It projects itself in various literary forms in which he struggles to articulate his conflicts. The forms too may not be new. The most modern of the literary forms of the experimentalists in Punjabi poetry are available in Guru Nanak's writing. He attempted prose-poems. He was a master of free verse. His use of internal rhymes is most skilful. A master artiste, he baffles the critic trying to docket and compartmentalise the literary heritage.

Modernity in Punjabi literature goes back to the modernisation of our times. Towards the close of the last century and the beginning of the present, there was a wind of change in the Punjab. The Britishers had consolidated themselves and the impact of their way of life came to be felt more and more. We emulated them and in our attempt to spread education, opened schools and colleges, libraries and reading-rooms. Presses were established and newspapers and books were printed in large numbers. The learning of the English language and the study of its literature became popular and with it new windows were opened on Western culture and its way of thinking. We came to be influenced by Western thought, paradoxically speaking, in our attempt to resist

some of its unwanted overtones. The friction made us self-conscious; it intensified the experience. The Singh Sabha Movement among the Sikhs and its counterparts among the Hindus and the Muslims in the Punjab were a direct outcome of proselytising by the Christian missionaries through their translations of the Holy Bible into modern Indian languages and their free distribution of neatly produced pamphlets in the streets and homes as instruments of their propaganda. A crop of denominational schools sprang up in an attempt to safeguard and preserve the respective cultures and traditions of various religions against the onslaught of Christianity.

Along with this came political consciousness; an awareness, as it were, of the injustice inherent in the situation; an alien race coming all the way from thousands of kilometres to rule over a people who had a glorious past to be proud of, who were brave and heroic and had won many a battle. This awareness became acute after the First World War when Punjabi soldiers fought with British shoulder to shoulder, won laurels on the battle-field and proved their supremacy indisputably. The soldier in the theatres of war in Europe had an opportunity to see a bit of the outside world and get enlightened. Life in the army and comparative prosperity after the war also helped foster in him new pursuits; he wanted to live in more hygienic environments and showed scant respect for old prejudices. He yearned for reading materials to keep him in touch with what was happening around him; he no longer objected to the education of women and with the bicycle which brought the town nearer, the distances began to shrink.

Bhai Vir Singh (1872–1957), the grand old man of our time, upheld the torch of modernism in Punjabi literature. He is the first landmark on the highway of modernity in Punjabi writing. A profound scholar of a number of Indian languages, he was no stranger to English literature of which he had made a careful study. He is the first writer among the creative artistes who took to writing in Punjabi as a profession with a definite purpose. He left a vast wealth of writing, both poetry and prose, and dominated the Punjabi literary scene for several decades. Starting as a pamphleteer, crusading for the preservation and propagation of Sikh traditions and ideals, he has left some fine specimens of prose of ideas, chaste, idiomatic and highly expressive. As a poet, he had a humble beginning, a singer of the praises of the Guru,

but with his fine sensibility and skill as a craftsman, he soared to the dizzy heights of *Rana Surat Singh*, an epic written in blank verse. A devout Sikh, Bhai Vir Singh confined himself strictly to Sikh thought and religious philosophy. It served the need of the hour but it submerged the thinker in him and bound him down to what he inherited in the Sikh tradition. He is, therefore, the best exponent of the Sikh way of life and the annotator of the vast heritage of the *Guruvani*. His prose in *Nanak Chamatkar* and *Kalghidhav Chamatkar*, biographies of the Sikh gurus, strike a lyrical note and are highly charged with emotion. More often than not, his prose reads like poetry, for the themes are idealised. But, then he was not a historian trying to portray a period; he was a lover singing the praises of his beloved in highly colourful, exaggerated and ornate prose. However, his *Guru Granth Kosh* (1927), a dictionary of *Guru Granth Sahib* and his annotation of *Guru Pratap Suraj Granth* (1933) are highly scholarly works, testifying to the deep erudition of the scholar-poet. Because of his preoccupation with Sikh teachings, his attempts at novel-writing in *Sundri*, *Bije Singh*, *Satwant Kaur*, etc., were also not particularly successful. Notwithstanding all this, the fact remains that Bhai Vir Singh did pioneering work in fiction writing in Punjabi. He pulled the Punjabi prose out of the crude and amateurish narratives of the lives of Sikh gurus and exploits of Sikh heroes in their fight against the aggressors.

Bhai Vir Singh's most significant contribution is in the field of poetry. He was better known as a poet in his time and he is going to live as such. Bhai Vir Singh released Punjabi verse from the stranglehold of traditional forms. He rejected the unwieldy, cumbersome forms of old and employed short, quick-moving rhythmic patterns, easier to handle and more congenial for the articulation of the moods of modern man. Where he could not change, he modified the old form to approximate to the tempo of life in his time. A new metre *Turai* was evolved on the pattern of the Persian metre *Rubai*, and Bhai Vir Singh wrote some excellent verse in it. He retrieved Punjabi poetry from the excesses of the Persian tradition with its extravagant modes and insisted on directness and sincerity of style. He rejected the straight-jacket rigidity of old forms and indulged in taking liberties with the accepted modes where the contents demanded this or the flow of emotions dictated that. Here was a genius who was too big to accept the tyranny of tradition. In *Rana*

Surat Singh, a great work running into over fourteen thousand lines, the poet employed blank verse to narrate the mystical experiences of an evolved soul. It is the journey of a dejected spirit in search of eternal bliss and its ultimate union with godhead. The story runs thus: The King is dead and the Queen feels she must die with him. The world to her is dark without the light of her beloved. She can neither eat nor drink. An unending flow of tears is withering her away. And then she is awakened, as it were. She undertakes a strange pilgrimage of the soul. She soars from one spiritual stage to another; higher and higher she goes until she is united with the departed soul. The comparative freedom of blank verse enabled the poet to express some of the most involved mystical experiences in vivid terms. In Bhai Vir Singh we mark the first step leading towards making use of a personal idiom by a poet. Mohan Singh made more sophisticated use of it later. Like the old masters, Waris and Bulhe Shah, Vir Singh relates his inner experience to the outer world of reality in simple terms and in images of everyday use so that the communication is vivid and easy to comprehend. A self-conscious writer, Vir Singh was aware of the impact of pleasing patterns in print. He exploited these in his published works to great advantage. Bhai Vir Singh was, however, preoccupied with the soul all his life. The pre-occupation with the soul inevitably means the rejection of the body. The reader, therefore, finds today lack of social content in his poetry. It is like our trying to find something that was not placed there. His aim was to stimulate the soul. He yearned for a life of sensations. Influenced by Keats and Wordsworth, the poets popularly taught in Indian schools and colleges, he talked about birds and flowers. There is an exclusive collection of poems on Kashmir. The poet waxes lyrical about the rivers, the gardens, the archaeological remains of Kashmir. It is nature, not the people of Kashmir, which emerges as a dominant image from the entire collection. The dirt and the squalor, the poverty and the economic backwardness of the inhabitants of Kashmir did not seem to touch the very gentle and refined poet that Vir Singh was. Bhai Vir Singh was retiring in disposition: he avoided publicity, he avoided people. It is no wonder that his poetry lacks social significance. In several thousand pages of his writings, there is hardly any mention of the gruelling struggle for freedom being waged then by his countrymen. He belonged to Amritsar; yet there is no mention of the massacre of Jallianwala

Bagh anywhere in his writings! He talks about the Golden Temple and ignores the tragic happenings at a stone's throw from it. What stirred Tagore hundreds of kilometres away in Bengal failed to touch a bard living in the midst of the cruel drama, is a phenomenon that seems to baffle critics. Did he align himself with the reactionary forces? Was he too timid to talk about the in-justice of the foreign ruler? It was not so, it was really his predilec-tion for things spiritual which was responsible for this obvious lapse.

Rain had just stopped when a drop was still hanging on a cable;
It was about to fall but had not yet fallen on the ground,
Somebody asked what he was looking for;
Sayeth he: Countless were my comrades;
We came together from Heaven;
Which way have they all gone, I am looking all around.

Vir Singh was essentially a mystic. A devotee of Nanak, he submitted himself to the disclpline of his Master's teachings. His spirit of equanimity distinguishes him from the Sufi poets who are associated with a more impatient and restless state of mind. His is a placid flow of the current:

Who dares drink with me—except the rolling waves of the Chenab?
The quarrels of Ranjha are not ended yet
His bowl is yet on the potter's wheel.
On the moonlit bank of the Chenab stands she the daughter of Jhang Syal,
The river rolls on, and she pours out at last her golden vase of wine on the Chenab
The wine trickles in a thin ruby thread on the rolling waves
And the majestic river rolls on.

It is a highly personal poetry in which there is no scope whatsoever for the weal and the woes of the neighbour:

He came this way, that way he went;
I am not searching for him,
I am but looking towards the way he went.

And yet Bhai Vir Singh is modern. In him we notice a departure from the traditional forms and the traditional modes of thinking.

Undoubtedly he released Punjabi poetry from the rigid classical modes of versification.

The time was, perhaps, not yet ripe for talking about everyday problems in serious poetry in a more direct way. This is indicated from the writing of Puran Singh (1881–1931), another stalwart of this period. There is no doubt that Puran Singh was acquainted with the most radical traditions of literature both in the East and the West. A chemist by profession, he had a scientific bent of mind and a keen sensibility. He was, by any standard, one of the tallest literary figures of his time. He broke all barriers of tradition and wrote poetry in free verse in the style of Walt Whitman. The freshness of his imagery, the vitality of his expression, the form in his formlessness are qualities of his poetry, the significance of which is yet to be fully appreciated. Puran Singh talks about the poor, the hungry, the have-nots, and idealises them; he sees in their eyes a peace, a contentment which he misses in the vulgar rich. He reinterpreted the popular classic *Puran Bhagat* and gave it a new slant. He addresses Ranjha as his brother and Heer as his sister. The lovers of the Punjab romances became gods for him. He sings the praises of humble trees, sees untold beauty in lesser-known flowers and longs to hug the cattle grazing in the fields. He adores the secluded corners where lovers meet. The poor cowdung-cake maker becomes an artist when the poet paints her in his inimitable style. Puran Singh brought the gods to the level of the common man and raised the common man, the worker, the labourer, the farmer, the lover to the level of the gods. His verse flows with the vigour of a torrent and smashes all tenets of prosody held dear by his predecessors. He recreates everyday Punjabi scenes and characters and makes them immortal. He relates the philosophy of Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh to Western philosophy and gives it a new perspective and a deeper content. In his prose writings, he talks about the significance of adult franchise and on subjects like the economic aspect of industrialisation for the first time in Punjabi language. It is a pity that Puran Singh did not live long. It is a greater pity that his short life was full of economic and emotional struggles. In him we had the making of a great scholar-poet of our time. A scientifically-oriented mind, he brought healthier traditions to Punjabi writing; he opened new vistas and he widened their field with fresh subjects. In Puran Singh, Punjabi literature took a firm step forward towards

modernity. The mood of abandonment in his poetry is not that of an old mystic, it has the impetuosity of a new lover. Puran Singh was a close friend of Vir Singh, deeply committed to him and spiritually under his influence. And yet he was very different from him. He had his own idiom, his own imagery, and his own individual approach to problems. Yet he seems to be emulating his master by deliberate avoidance of political overtones in his writings. A progressive, who gave quarter to a revolutionary like Hardyal, who put up a Japanese spy with him for several months in Dehra Dun, strangely enough he does not anywhere talk about the right of his people to throw away the political yoke of the foreign rulers.

Mohan Singh does so. We have travelled a great distance towards modernity when we come to the celebrated author of *Save Pattar.* Mohan Singh truly represents his times. Here is a poet who is conscious of his responsibility towards his people. As a creative artiste, he has lived through momentous times and has accepted healthy influences of various forces working around him. He had known Bhagat Singh, Gandhi, Nehru, the partition of India, and then fought arm-in-arm with crusaders for peace. On the teaching staff of Khalsa College, Amritsar, a premier institution of the Punjab, Mohan Singh had, as his colleagues, live minds like Prof. Teja Singh, Prof. Gurbachan Singh 'Talib', and Prof. Sant Singh Sekhon. Every word that he wrote came for close scrutiny at the hands of his learned friends. They were all students of English literature. It was here that Mohan Singh came to be influenced by the best writers in the West in his time. It is a strange phenomenon that the Punjabi writer has always accepted the influence of the Western tradition in creative writing more than the sister languages like Urdu and Hindi. Mohan Singh's early poems are noted for boldness with which he talks about his personal love. Unlike Bhai Vir Singh who talked about spiritual love in the style of Sufi poets, Mohan Singh talks about his beloved in language which is highly personal. In place of the vague generalisations of his predecessors, he concretises his images in a highly realistic, highly sensuous idiom. He made frequent use in his shorter compositions of dialects, introduced conversational rhythms, and evolved patterns which change with the changing mood of the narrative in his longer poems and thought-content. His use of symbols, his clever employment of the technique of the stream of consciousness, his

resort to internal rhymes and half-rhymes, his attempt to bring the language of poetry near the everyday speech of the common man are some of the features of his verse which he shares with the modernist of his time in the West. Mohan Singh who wrote about Anarkali and Noor Jehan also developed acute social awareness. His subjects are the poor fruit vendor outside his lane, the humble farmers of Pothoar and the heroic soldiers of the Punjab. No longer does he merely sing of the grandeur of the Taj; he is reminded of the thousands of labourers who sweated and died in creating this great piece of art. He challenges the traditions and social values of his time. He tries to look for the cause of the political bondage of his country, the backwardness of his people, the inequality in his society. He asks in an agonised tone why the woman he loves cannot be his:

At the door stood she—a piece of property;
Beside her stood the owner, her husband,
And in front, the lover.
At the door stood she,
Silent and still,
Like a lily-white marble pillar,
Her breasts were like two caged doves,
Her eyes like two bits of luminous stone,
Her lips like two rubies,
Silent and helpless.
Ended were her speech and her smile,
Woe to this benighting shadow of convention,
Woe to this bloodthirsty ogre of custom.

Beside her
Stood the husband
Placing his hand upon her shoulder
He said:
'This is my property;
I am the master,
Manu's law favours me;
So does man's
So does my rank;
The religion,
And the custom.
The heart?

That matters not.
I shall see
How this handsome edifice
Can refuse to give me shelter,
Or deny me warmth in winter,
And cold in summer.

In front, the lover,
Resolute in thought:
'A piece of property,
Yes,
She is
A silent rock,
Which the fire of my love,
Cannot melt today,
I shall further inflame this fire.
Changing this world,
I shall return some day,
I shall recall her to life.

"Jaidad" (Property) Tr. Harbans Singh

Starting his poetic career as an ardent adherent of the traditional forms in *Char Hanjhu*, Mohan Singh indulged in bold and difficult experimentation during his youth:

The vastness of space and the remoteness of time
Are shrinking every moment
Before man's expanding intellect
From Peru to Peshawar
From the Cape of Good Hope to Bering
Countries and continents are growing smaller and smaller,
Hitler, Attila and Chenghiz Khan,
Are drinking bowls of blood-red wine.
Wishing each other luck,
Beauty hired by evil passion
Is squeezed in its embrace.

"Gori Vich Kalave" (The Damsel in Embrace)

In Pritam Singh 'Safeer' we notice a distinct predilection for the unknown and the unfamiliar symbol. He is cynical, pessimistic; he seems to have lost faith in everything around him:

The collyrium dyed eyes of a maid,
Inset with scenes of love,
She has crossed the Chenab seven times or more,
With her face like a dove,
She catches hold of the garment of a groom.

'Safeer' is the most typical of the modernists of his time. His poetry provides a fascinating study of the impatience of the new writer. The moment his thoughts begin to deepen, his peace slows down, and he looks rather overwhelmed by the weight of his thinking. Then he makes a dash, as it were, and his language seems to lag behind. He appears to be playing hide and seek with his themes. One feels he is saying what he wants to and yet not quite completely. A distrust of life, a lack of faith in heavenly justice, a consciousness of sin in beauty, a futile search for truth, these are some of the recurring themes in 'Safeer's' poetry.

Amrita Pritam highlighted the injustice done to women in our male-dominated society and shocked quite a few with her bold stance.

An International Conference of Progressive Writers in Paris in 1934 was followed by a Conference of the Indian Progressives meeting in Lucknow in 1935 under the chairmanship of Prem Chand. The old concept of art for art's sake was formally abandoned as a result of these deliberations. More than anything else, the short story came into its own due to the renewed awareness on the part of the writer of his responsibility to his readers. Krishan Chander, Saadat Hasan Manto, Rajendra Singh Bedi were in the vanguard of this movement in the Punjab. Mulk Raj Anand, wherever he may be, in whatever language he may write, has always been claimed by the Punjabis as theirs and his utterances influence them deeply. Prof. Sant Singh Sekhon gave a lead in story writing along the new lines in Punjabi. His short story 'Pemi de nyane' established the vast possibilities of this new genre as a vehicle of thought. It is a suggestive, psychological and highly convincing picture of everyday common characters in our society. This marked a conscious shift in new writing in Punjabi from the portrayal of the privileged to that of the under-privileged. Along with this came an accent on new forms: the use of everyday idiom of the people, and the more frequent resort to dialects in plays and fiction. Mohan Singh employed Pothoari dialect with tremendous

effect even in his verse. But before long the pendulum seems to have swung to the other extreme. In our effort to highlight the common man, the under-privileged, we started looking for the seamy side of life, the dirt and the squalor in which he lives. We ripped open the gutters, as it were, and there was a pungent stink all over. The realism in the new writing soon became a morbidity. Saadat Hasan Manto was repeatedly prosecuted for propagating obscenity. The new writer wanted to shock the reader out of his complacency and had eminently succeeded. We talked about forbidden subjects like homo-sexuality, unnatural relations between human beings and animals, deformed characters, demented personalities, and the mechanisation of man. We dived deep into the inner recesses of the characters and shouted the unspoken from house-tops.

The poet was all this while busy perfecting a language devised to communicate those experiences that defy the established order and the conventional pace of prose. A crop of new poets emerged. Amongst them Dr. Harbhajan Singh and Jaswant Singh Neki are, perhaps, the most representative. Their imagination is increasingly patterned on everyday speech. They indulge in 'association' of ideas, skipping from one image to another. They are preoccupied with the unconscious. Rejecting the uncommon, the extraordinary, the heroic, they project the common man. Continuing Mohan Singh's tradition, they write secular verse which is quite unlike Vir Singh's marked bias for spirituality and Puran Singh's heavy undertones for mysticism. It is no more the function of the poet merely to communicate ideas. He must project the 'vibrations' experienced by the sensitive artiste in him. The influx of ideas in our society today is playing havoc with the new writer. Harbhajan Singh saves his verse by his diction and an uncanny understanding of speech rhythms. Neki, at times, gives the impression of being involved and difficult to understand.

The newest among the new, the so-called Angry Young Men are establishing their bona fides to merit serious notice of their contribution to Punjabi writing. They reject their heritage and are trying to make a positive contribution to Punjabi letters today.

Modernity, to my mind, is a sensibility related to contemporary phenomena like the machine, the industrial order, and the recognition of neurotic behaviour. The task of the writer is to

assess the effects of this change. The process which began with the advent of the present century in the Punjab is continued in varied forms. But along with it the mainstream of life in the region seems to be changing faster at times than its chroniclers.

KSD

10

Poetry

Bhai Vir Singh (1872–1957)

Poetic creation in the 19th century had remained circumscribed in the old tradition of *kissa* and *siharfi* on one side and Pauranic, folk legend, *bara maha* etc. on the other. But the temper changes as if to synchronise with the turn of the century and the leading figure in the new period is Bhai Vir Singh, who switched to the short poem form and also the long epic in the manner of the English poetry of that time. In fact, his long epic *Rana Surat Singh* (1903) preceded in publication his collections of short poems, "Laharan de Har" (Garlands of Ripples, 1908), "Bijlian de Har" (Garlands of Lightning Flashes, 1910).

The core theme of Bhai Vir Singh's poetry is the exposition and reassertion of Sikh religious doctrine and sentiment. The treatment is more mystical than truly philosophical. The motifs are taken from nature and Indian political history right up to the end of the British period. In his treatment of nature, he is influenced powerfully by the English poet Wordsworth. But while the spirit informing Wordsworth's nature is not Christian but mystical pagan, nature for Bhai Vir Singh is only the manifestation of an imminent Divine Spirit. For instance, in Wordsworth's Lucy poems nature is a Being apart from the Godhead posited by religion. While nature takes Lucy under her care "To make a lady of my own", Bhai Vir Singh finds a reflection of God's glory in the spring *Vairi Nag,* from which the Jhelam river issues:

> Vairi Nag, when thy first sight strikes the eye,
> The glory of the Creator commands our obeisance.
>
> The wave in the sea rising on the night of the full moon,
> strains to reach up to the sky.

It yearns in its ebulience to reach up to the Prince Charming,
residing in the far distance.

The inaccessible and intangible is described in these terms:

You came to me in a dream,
And I ran to embrace you,
But, pure light, you escaped my hold,
And my wrist was left trembling.

This metaphysical trend is all-pervading in Bhai Vir Singh's poetry. In a poem, "The Ruins of Martand", he writes:

The Martand was smitten long ago
As the people say.
But a tremor in its stones
Can be felt even in the present.
Woe to India, a fruit of being divided
Said every stone and wept.

This reflects the common belief among the Indian people that they lost to the invaders because they were divided politically into small warring states and socially into mutually exclusive castes.

The painful awareness of subjection to British rule, Bhai Vir Singh expresses only in a parable of the parrot (Ganga Ram) who is happy in his cage because its master feeds him well. (A pointer to the satisfactory condition of law and other state enterprises to promote the welfare of the Indian people, like the construction of railways and canals and opening of schools and hospitals) but when the bird outside the cage asks if it can fly out of the cage at will, it evades the question as irrelevant.

To man's concerns in this life also Bhai Vir Singh refers rather deprecatingly, pointing to the fear of his getting swallowed by them.

O washerman, washing clothes, brother, beware,
The crocodile is approaching you from behind to swallow
you up.

The word, *sansar*, used here for crocodile, of course, means also this world.

Metaphysical conceit is a frequent device in Bhai Vir Singh's poetry. For instance, he writes:

The piece of charcoal washed many times with soap,
and soaked in milk and curds,

put on fire to dye, too,
Would not change its hue.
The blackness that resulted from separation,
Would not go before reunion.
Put it in the embrace of the fire,
It will shine bright again.

The beauty of Harvan pool is described similarly:

O Harvan pool, all a-ripple,
in the lap of the mountains.
Are you really water,
or an illusion of the eye?
Or an emerald floor covered
with crystal water?
Or a batch of green fairies,
spread along the skies?

There are many such poems celebrating the beauty of famous places and scenes in Kashmir, such as "Jivan Ki Hai?" (What is Life?) "Nishat Bagh", and "Nur Jahan", in which the same sensitive conceit is the main device. There is a poetic sensuousness in such conceits:

Tonight, O dear, the beloved himself
held me in a tight embrace,
The warmth and kindness of his embrace I also felt.

In his longer poems like "Mard da Kutta" (A Man's Dog) "Barde ki Malik (Slave or Master), "Minh Mihar" (The Rain of Grace), Bhai Vir Singh is more didactic at the cost of the descriptive aspect.

The motif of withdrawal from the world also recurs frequently in Bhai Vir Singh's poetry. In his "Varjit Vari" (Prohibited Garden), he gives this name to this world and bewails his absorption in it. In "Meri Jinde" (My Soul) he writes:

My soul! your place should have been on the bank of a stream,
or in the thick of the woods,
Your part was to fly in the heavens and carol alone,
Your life was just enough for you,
To play with your own being.
How have you come into this world's turmoil
with cares and worries all around?

Similarly, in "Banafashe da Phul" (The Flower of Banafasha), he sees the tiny flower growing under a ledge in the hills, unconcerned with and hidden from the world. The poet laments that he cannot live like this tiny flower:

> My desire to live hidden and to die hidden,
> Ah, woe; cannot be realised, I live in torture.

He grieves at the prevalence of unhappiness in the world and his inability to lessen it.

> To look at the unhappiness of this world my heart sinks and sinks;
> My inner self, melting flows out in tears through my eyes.
> The world's unhappiness does not lessen,
> Even if one gives one's life.
> But one cannot be a stone either,
> I cannot help grieving at this unhappiness.

Bhai Vir Singh's masterpiece, however, is the epic poem *Rana Surat Singh*. In this poem he constructs a story and places it in recent history, which strongly reminds one of the fate of the Sikh people after the destruction of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's kingdom. Surat Singh (incidentally the name of the father of Sir Sunder Singh Majithia, a Sikh chief important in the counsels of the British rulers in the first quarter of this century, who was a friend and admirer and to some extent patron of Bhai Vir Singh and the Singh Sabha Movement of which Bhai Vir Singh was a leading spokesman), a small Sikh chief marries the beautiful Raj Kaur, daughter of a hill Raja and inherits his father-in-law's principality. But soon afterwards he is killed in a battle with an unspecified foe. His widow, Raj Kaur, is drowned in grief, even to the neglect of her princely duties. She is advised to seek solace in the company of saints who gather in the Gurudwara to sing the word of the Guru. Through the blessings of a saint she is able in the company of her old nurse to fly into the four domains in the upper world, named as in Guru Nanak's *Japu, Gian Khand* (The Domain of Enlightenment), *Sharm Khand* (The Domain of Virtuous Action), *Karm Khand* (The Domain of Supernatural Powers) and *Sach Khand* (The Domain of Truth), where the Divine, above all worldly qualities, dwells, while this world is the *Dharma Khand* (The Domain of Duty). Ultimately Rani Raj Kaur is persuaded to live in uninterrupted remembrance of her deceased husband and attend

to her worldly duties. Many people have read in this epic an allegory describing the condition of the Sikhs especially the landed aristocracy, after their loss of political power and advocating withdrawal from the domain of political power (which had been taken away from them in any case) to the domain of meditation and religious life. Indeed, it is difficult to read any other meaning into this poem. On a sheer superficial level one can say, in the words of Kirpal Singh Kasel: "In it are described the lament and grief of a widowed woman tortured by memories of the love of her husband. An attempt is made to bring peace to her grieving mind through inculcation of the principles of the Sikh religion".

Bhai Vir Singh has experimented in this epic with a verse form which is not entirely new but has undoubtedly been rarely used before him. The verse has been called *sirkhandi*, because of the absence of rhyme at the end of the line, but there is rhyme in the middle which is very regular indeed. In fact, it is an inverted form of what is called *upman* or *nishani chhand* which has been extensively used in poems of love and war in Punjabi.

The long epic abounds in rich descriptions of nature, its sounds and silences, lights and shadows, and calm and storm. The calm is much more frequent. Rani Raj Kaur is an ethereal creature, indeed a pleasant phantom in our world of mundane reality. Because of Bhai Vir Singh's constant harping on the Sikh principle of meditation and peace, it presents only one side of the Sikh ideal widely accepted by the Sikhs during the first fifty years of British rule in the Punjab.

This poetry is largely modern in form. In spirit, it is oriental in that it lays stress on otherworldliness. Indeed by some it has been called pre-modern, a bridge between the oriental and the truly modern.

SSS

Bhai Vir Singh has been particularly fortunate in the translators of his verse into English. He inspired Puran Singh who was no ordinary poet in his own right. Acknowledging his gratitude to the poet, Puran Singh says:

> I received poetry and it was by the favour of that kindly eye. His dulcet, prophetic words, touched automatically the source of my own Punjabi vocabulary. The faults of what is learnt are all personal, the merits the gift of the giver. What I am is but a humble being, a beggar walking from door to door,

but the fire in my eye is his. So is the shining, burning jewel within my heart.

Puran Singh highlighted selected pieces of Bhai Vir Singh's verse in English translation published in London under the title *Nargas* for which the foreword was provided by Ernest Rhys, the renowned English poet of the day. A mystic, Puran Singh eminently retains the essential beauty of the original in this piece.

He came this way; that way he went;
I saw him and I lost him.
He was but now before my eyes;
He has just gone that way.
He has just gone, and cannot yet return.
Ask me not what I am doing in the open—in the rain,
sunshine and storm!
Touch me not, advise me not!
He came this way; that way he went.
I saw him and I lost him.
He was just before my eyes;
I am not searching for him,
I am but looking the way he went;
They said he would not return;
But my left hand shades my eyes,
And I look—my eyelids do not droop—on the road that he has gone.

It is gratifying that one of the activities undertaken to mark the poet's birth centenary in 1972 by UNESCO was sponsoring a translation into English of his selected poetic works. The rendering is a pooled endeavour of Gurbachan Singh 'Talib,' Harbans Singh and Yann Lovelock. Talib has handled shorter poems from various collections in Punjabi. Harbans Singh has devoted himself to the translation of excerpts from the epic *Rana Surat Singh* and Lovelock seems to have ensured the readability of the text in English. One couldn't ask for a better team. All of them seem to have deep respect for the poet and have tried to project him with sympathy and understanding. But as confessed by Harbans Singh "... this is a poetry too delicate, too exquisite to translate into another idiom." The use of onomatopoeia and alliteration etc. in the original to exploit fully the imitative potential of the language becomes the despair of the translator. "Kambdi Kalaee" translated as "The

Tremulous Hand" and "Dhola Russ Ke Na Ja" as "Do not Leave Me" are instances of shorter poems defying projection of their original sensuous rhythm and subtle nuances of emotions, more due to the translator's anxiety to communicate the content with all its shades."

Harbans Singh's rendering succeeds in capturing the agonised melody and intense spirituality of the heroine of the epic, *Rana Surat Singh*, in this piece:

Sighing, I supplicate the rippling stream
To flow in silence, seeing you asleep,
In ignorance that you, perhaps enjoy
Immortal wakefulness.
In this I sin.
Let your benevolence pardon my fault.
The flowers I offered yesterday are dead;
You have not moved your hands to throw them by
But graciously have left your slave this task.
Its strange game you play with me now, my dear.
Concealed in your eternal hiding place.
I have grown weary
Looking: Let my eyes
Glimpse you again. Take pity on your wife,
A woman is not made to be alone.

One is inclined to agree with Professor Harbans Singh when he says:

> This poetry may be lacking in social significance. But it has that elemental beauty, that rare creative quality and that universality of appeal which are the marks of the most perfect and genuine utterance of the human spirit.

Mere Saeean Jeo, the last collection of his poems, which appeared in 1953 and won the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1955, was noticed in Punjabi literary circles as a writing of a virile mind. Coming from a writer who had already celebrated his eightieth birthday, this was considered to be a welcome sign.

One of the poems in the collection entitled "Hind Gagan da Indu" translated by Gurbachan Singh 'Talib' as "The Immortal Light" is a homage to Mahatma Gandhi on his martyrdom. An exquisite piece in the original has been rendered sensitively and succeeds eminently in retaining the charm of the original:

In the lonely hours of the midnight
Under the moonlight's faery spell
A silent footstep,
A soft music creeping into the souls:
Raghupati Raghav Raja Ram!
Patit Pavan Sita Ram!
Who is there—
Is it you Gandhiji?
The soft tune rose again
In divine ecstasy
Where all creeds mingle
To create a faith, for man,
Harmony, love, destroyer of hates:
Allah Ram
Allah Ram
Raghupati Raghav Raja Ram!

KSD

Dhani Ram 'Chatrik' (1876–1954)

Dhani Ram 'Chatrik', disciple of Bhai Vir Singh, who came under the master's influence as a compositor in Bhai Vir Singh's family press which published exclusively his work. Chatrik's poetic career, however, had started with the writing of *Kissas* from the Indian tradition, namely, *Bharthari Hari* and *Damyanti,* the latter, a legend from the *Mahabharata.* But 'Chatrik' does not continue in this tradition and walking over into Bhai Vir Singh's school begins writing short poems in the master's manner. However, the pupil does not assimilate the master's mystical and philosophical overtones. His language is a direct, refined Punjabi and the motifs are taken from the domestic life of the Punjabi Hindu townsman whose mild patriotism he shares as well as his traditional attachment to ancient legend and tradition-bound social practices. Indeed, 'Chatrik' gives expression to that Punjabi urban culture which the Punjabi Hindu had all but discarded under the revivalist influence of the Arya Samaj.

Born in a village of Amritsar district and living and working in the town of Amritsar, Dhani Ram 'Chatrik' could not shed that community of culture which a hundred years of Sikh ascendancy had nurtured in Central Punjab.

From the point of form Chatrik's poetry conforms to classical norms, it has all the music, rhythm and flow of classical forms. If there is anything more refined in its vocabulary and syntax, it is his expression that has the grace and dignity of the well-bred Punjabi townsman.

In subject matter, Chatrik's poetry has six representative aspects as Kirpal Singh Kasel and Parminder Singh have succinctly defined; description of Punjabi life, portrayal of nature, communication of patriotic and common national sentiments, the ache of political subjection, religious and moral instruction, and the romance of the Indian tradition. Krishna, among his cows and milkmaids, producing anxiety and jealousy in Radha's mind, is Chatrik's favourite subject in which Radha is painted as the loving, anxiety-ridden spouse. Her unbounded devotion to Lord Rama is another archetype that 'Chatrik' presents.

In his descriptions of nature, 'Chatrik' is more objective and extrovert than Bhai Vir Singh, as, for instance, in *Himalaya Parbat* (The Himalaya Mountain) in which the scenic description is altogether unsophisticated but refined. Another poem, 'Basant' (Spring) is similarly emotive, though rural in character:

With her elaborate toiletry and clean and
fair face, above the high bosom
On which spreads a multi-coloured shawl,
and eyes a-sparkle with ineffable inebrience,
Working magic with the gestures of her eyes
and challenging wayfarers to get caught in her snare,
Raising her swing and spreading perfume,
She kills the living and revives the dead.

In one of his poems, patriotic concern is expressed thus:

My heart is being roasted alive,
Why don't the heroic people of my Punjab
advance and take a stand.
The boatmen have thrown down their oars while
still they are on the bank of the mirage.
They cannot accept rolling in dust,
who have claims to being eagles.

His concept of subjection and slavery is rather vague on the political side, as for instance, in this verse:

If you want the sleep of peace,
Don't be dependent on the rich.
Better than the sugared pie of the slave are the
crumbs available to a mendicant.
Live a life of freedom,
Even if you dress in rags.

After independence, he sings, first, in a mood of jubilation and thanksgiving:

Thanks be that the much awaited hour of fair liberty,
Spreading the light of joy and gaiety, has dawned at last,
The two centuries-old chains of slavery have broken,
The austerities and sacrifices of Gandhi and Jawaharlal
have borne fruit.

But in the same hour of freedom when the Punjab on both sides of the new border experiences unprecedented large-scale violence, carnage and desecration, he is constrained to complain to the divine power with equal anguish:

Thou ought'st to have seen the heaps of dead bodies,
Seen the streams of blood-red water,
Heard the wailings of those twisting in pain
Thou ought'st to have seen the plight of those
Who were widowed, O Lord of Providence.
Thou ought'st to have seen those houries and fairies,
Who were kidnapped and abducted by beastly ruffians,
Who fell victim to those without mercy,
And burnt themselves in fire with their children
In their laps, O Lord of Providence.

In another poem, he describes the corruption and nepotism that have come too soon, alas, in the wake of freedom:

The son-in-law of a paternal uncle this,
And that the son-in-law of a maternal uncle,
And the husband of the wife's sister and her brother,
And the brother of that brother-in-law's wife,
Corner all the contracts,
Without active participation in the sordid business.

In another poem bewailing the large-scale deaths of Muslim evacuees in flood, he says:

Do not mourn, friends, over my death,
Rather congratulating me on it will be like much-awaited
rain-drop to the rain-bird.

('Chatrik,' the pen-name of the poet, actually means the bird in Indian legend, who drinks only drops of rain but otherwise remains painfully thirsty.)

The poems of 'Chatrik' were published in collections like *Chandan Vari* (The Garden of Sandalwood), *Kesar Kiari* (The Bed of Saffron), *Nawan Jehan* (New World) and *Sufi Khana* (House of Sufis), 1950.

SSS

Kripa Sagar (1875–1939)

Kripa Sagar is famous for his long narrative poem *Lakshmi Devi*, written largely in the traditional *Upman Chhand* in which many stories of love and war have been written in Punjabi. It marks a change in both style and tone. Modelled on the "Lady of the Lake" of Sir Walter Scott, both in its spirit of romance and realistic historical narrative, it celebrates Maharaja Ranjit Singh's conquest and annexation of the hill state of Jammu, whose earlier ruler was properly compensated as a tributary chief by the great Maharaja. This reconciliation has been given an imaginative and romantic correlative in the shape of the Dogra Raja's daughter falling in love with the benign conqueror. In the description of the princess Lakshmi Devi's beauty, Kripa Sagar follows rather the 19th century *Kissa* writers of Punjabi than the more realistic Scottish poet. Describing the princess boating on the river, Kripa Sagar writes:

As she rowed her muslin scarf waved in the air,
And revealed a face like the full moon which
people see to admire.
Her beaming face put the mount of Sinai in eclipse,
Her restless eyes sharp as daggers in their effect,
Were yet full of modesty.
Her cheeks wore the red of the apple of Kashmir,
Gave her face the look of the rose,
And her body was supple and lissom,
As if Providence had created a model of beauty,
With the intention of beautifying the world.

On the clerical staff of the University of Punjab at Lahore, Kripa Sagar wrote under the impulse of patriotism which was at that time inspiring Hindus and Muslims as well as Sikhs to remember the phenomenal glory of the Punjab in the near past. He has written a few short poems also which again describe natural and social scenes from the life of Punjab, like *Chenab da Kandha* (Bank of the Chenab) and *Savan* (Fair of Swings) celebrated by Punjabi women in the rainy month of *Savan*.

SSS

Kartar Singh Kalaswalia (1882–1952)

Kartar Singh Kalaswalia is well-known as a narrative poet who has Sikh history for his subject, starting with the life of Guru Gobind Singh and the martyrdom of his sons up to the end of the Sikh kingdom of Lahore and thereafter the Akali Movement of the 1920s. In many volumes, it is quasi-epic poetry written in *bait* form made popular by Waris Shah. There is not much in this verse to appeal to the taste of the modern sophisticated reader, but as mere narration of the history of the Sikhs with its changing vicissitudes, from a long spell of guerrilla struggle to a brief period of success in the shape of the establishment of the kingdom of Lahore and smaller states south of the Sutlej, it is widely popular with the Sikh masses. The most important among accounts are *Dasmesh Parkash* (Life of Guru Gobind Singh), *Baba Banda Bahadur, Sikh Khalsa* (The Persevering Faith), Tegh Khalsa (The Sword of the Khalsa), dealing with the period of the *misls* that destroyed Mughal power in the Punjab and *Raj Khalsa* (The Kingdom of the Khalsa) under Maharaja Ranjit Singh.

Punjab in Ferment

Like the rest of the country, Punjab was all agog with the spirit of nationalism that had seized the whole people, all of a sudden, after the First World War. In fact, like Bengal, the Punjab had also overstepped the limits of non-violence in 1918 at Jallianwala Bagh and experienced the might of British retribution in such an oppressive degree that Mahatma Gandhi had to come himself to Amritsar and Lahore to put the balm of national sympathy on the people's wounds. The great poet Rabindranath Tagore returned

the knighthood that the British rulers had conferred on him only lately after he had won the coveted Nobel Prize in 1913. The revolutionaries of the Ghaddar Movement, repudiated at that time by the leading Sikhs and unheeded by the common people, were now recognised as martyrs to the cause of Indian freedom. In fact, the declaration by the aristocratic and priestly managers and caretakers of the Golden Temple that the Ghadar Revolutionaries like Kartar Singh Sarabha who was sent to the gallows in 1917 with sixteen others and the saintly Randhir Singh, Basakha Singh and Sohan Singh, languishing in British prisons in the Andamans, were not true Sikhs was now seen as an outrage to national honour by the Sikh intelligentsia. Looking around they found not only the Golden Temple but even other major Gurudwaras like those of Nankana Sahib and Taran Taran to have become seats of corruption and debauchery under the caretakers who treated them as their personal property. All this corruption was regarded as a symptom of national degeneration by the Sikh middle class intelligentsia. Some leading Sikhs started agitating people's minds and turning this resentment against the British rulers who in the way of all ruling classes, especially in colonial countries, supported vested interests of even those of the corrupt priests of Sikh Gurudwaras as they did of the despotic and debauched native princes. A daily paper under the name of *Akali* began to be published from Lahore to propagate religious reform as well as national liberation. Apart from its far-reaching political effects, this occasioned a renaissance of letters among the people of the Punjab in which many Hindus and Muslims also joined. Much prose and poetry was written to propagate these ideas and to enthuse the people to join the movement for national liberation as well as religious reform. The Akali party was strengthened and was taken under its wing by the Indian National Congress. Among poets that became prominent in this sphere of activity,the names of Gurmukh Singh 'Musafir', Hira Singh `Dard', Vidhata Singh `Tir' and Ferozedin `Sharaf' particularly stand out. Very popular at that stage, their work does not come up to the literary standards set by later achievements in the field, though Gurmukh Singh `Musafir' was honoured with the Sahitya Akademi Award for short story given posthumously in 1978. He also wrote some worthwhile poetry in later years. Hira Singh `Dard' is remembered as a staunch Marxist and literary organiser. Ferozedin Sharaf's poetry has

perhaps greater literary merit, though he is as yet neglected because of his 19th century manner and style of writing.

SSS

Puran Singh (1881–1931)

Before we proceed with the discussion of other poets, notice must be taken of a poet, Puran Singh, whose genius transcends the level of contemporary Punjabi writing in manner as well as matter, a kind of freak who while endeavouring in the main to convey the message of oriental poetry and genius to the West through the English language, turns now and then to writing in Punjabi, both prose and verse, in which he strives to clothe ideas which he had imbibed from the West, those of them, in particular, which span, as it were, the gulf between the oriental and the occidental spirit. The American poets, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Walt Whitman particularly inspired his verse writings while the English writer Thomas Carlyle and American writer Thoreau inspired his prose.

Puran Singh went to Japan for studies where he was deeply influenced by the Japanese Buddhist way of life and became a disciple of the famous saint Swami Rama Tirtha, a Punjabi. Puran Singh had then renounced his Sikh upbringing and even discarded the Sikh symbols, long hair and beard and become a shaven ascetic. But so strong was his attachment to his mother that he returned to his ancestral faith and even married the girl of his mother's choice named, as if symbolically, Maya Devi. It was while yet in this fresh period of his rebirth that he happened to meet Bhai Vir Singh whose poetry entered the depths of his being. He wrote the foreword to Bhai Vir Singh's first collection of short poems, *Lahiran de Har* (Garlands of Ripples). He did not stop at that but set out to express himself in his own peculiar vein the result of which was *Khule Maidan* (Open Fields). The word 'open' signifies that his attempts are in free verse, not under the discipline of metre and rhyme which he called *Nawabi Qaid* (Feudal Confinement). But the quality of openness does not apply only to the form of his poetry, in subject-matter also Puran Singh displays an emotional as well as intellectual breadth with which Punjabi poetry was so far unfamiliar.

However, the range of subject-matter is by no means that open. Puran Singh begins with the story of Puran Bhakta with whom the poet seems to have felt identified in his yearning to be a roaming saint. Though Puran Singh is more of a saint perhaps in the Sufi

tradition than Indian yogis and saints were, his Puran Bhakta is by no means the colourless character that tradition paints him to be. Puran Singh seems to treat Puran Bhakta less as a moral abstainer than an aesthete who is impervious to the charms of a woman variously as mother, as temptress and as loving mate, and the few pages over which this story extends are a complete long poem by themselves.

Again Puran Singh is not queasy about the physical beauty of woman. He is not disturbed by any passionate feeling but this beauty stirs his aesthetic being. For instance, he is sorry for the young woman who lives with her aged husband among rather untrodden ways in the north of the valley of Srinagar. The young woman making cakes of cow-dung for fuel also touches a tender cord in him, but he does not get disturbed by any sociological or even sentimental concern about her, though he writes:

> Seeing the uprise of this rustic woman's arms
> My being swung upwards like a ball hit off a bat.

Puran Singh has not however outgrown the common Punjabi's almost universal infatuation with the love of Heer and Ranjha. Puran Singh idealises the two lovers as archetypes of the Punjabi character and entreats "'Brother Ranjha' and 'Sister Heer' not to leave us, the Punjabi people, for without them we are empty and hollow'".

Puran Singh also idealises the Punjab as 'living in the name of the Guru'. This sounds paradoxical in the context of events that have taken place in the history of the Punjab after his death in 1931. Till then he was more or less right in taking the Sikhs as surrogates for a Punjabi nationality, for even after the British annexation of the Punjab in 1850 to the end of the First World War, the Sikhs had ruled the roost in the Punjab under the British policy of conquering the hearts of the Sikhs by kindness. This policy was reversed on the introduction of what is called diarchy under which the Punjabi Muslim came in for preferential treatment, which may also have been the reason for the Sikhs' alienation from the British rulers after 1920.

But then Puran Singh widens his concept of the Punjabi character by calling all young men of the Punjab the younger and still younger brothers of Ranjha.

In his description of woman's beauty, he is not evasive like Bhai Vir Singh but direct and sensuous. In his long poem about Puran Bhakta, he describes the beauty of 'Luna', the step-mother who tries to seduce her teenaged step-son as:

Supple of eye, speech and limb,
she was beautiful like a snake,
Terrible, sharp-edged like the sword.

Slender-waisted with full, swelling bosom,
Which struck, ever and again, like lances.

When in a prayerful mood, his words become fluid and tender:

Letter after letter of mine falls
through my small little hands,
My hands small and little and gifts great and plentiful
Flowing like many Chenabs at once.

A second collection under the title of *Khule Ghund* (Open Veils) was published many years later. These poems are more involved and philosophical and therefore lack the rhythmic flow which characterises the earlier poems. There is something like the involved but intense expression of Gerald Manley Hopkins in these later poems, as if he has left behind the easy flow and rhythm that he had learnt from Walt Whitman.

Puran Singh is not didactic or revivalist in the way of Bhai Vir Singh or even Dhani Ram 'Chatrik'. His language is evocative of animal passion that later poets evolved under Freudian influence. He wants to go back to a pagan primitive kind of living which, forgetting all its sordid ailments, backward-looking people find healthy in an animal way. For instance, in one of his poems, he says:

I want to be an animal again.

In fact Puran Singh wants to live a life free of tension which, according to Dr. Harbhajan Singh, he does actually live in his poetry as when he says:

Rolling on the sand by river bank,
Lying naked under the sun,
And then jumping in the water to wash,
Swimming, sinking and flowing in the stream.

To look at fish jumping out of the water,
And catching in my hands the swimming ones
and letting them go.
And after washing and bathing,
Saying, "Who is there like me?"

Not to observe any rules,
Shunning all tenet and doctrine,
To live without rule and drowning all thought,
Laughing and weeping and shrieking.

In Dr Harbhajan Singh's words again, "When on seeing a forest girl or a Baloch's daughter, Puran Singh becomes sentimental, and speaks rapidly like a turbulent stream, he still does not get involved in any kind of desire. He is then neither a *rishi* who gets free of all emotion on the strength of spiritual thought, nor an ascetic who discards it as *maya* (illusion), nor a poet nor a lover who makes it the centre of his emotion and creation. It is not to admire you (Puran Singh) but to identify you that I say your relation with women is like that of Puran with Puran."

As if recoiling from the magnetism of woman's beauty, Puran Singh lays down in a later poem thus:

Son and daughter should receive due consideration,
Cast in the mould given by the Guru,
People awake day and night,
One should melt in the crucible of the hereafter,
Eyes ever wet, shining with moisture,
One should greet everybody with smiles,
There should be an ache in the heart,
An ache in which one should live.

A collection of poems entitled *Khule Asmani Rang* (Open Clouds of the Sky) not published during the poet's life-time was published in 1965 along with his biography and other collected works. These poems seem to have been written in the period when he lived in the district of Sheikhupura growing medicinal oil plants on a farm leased from the Government. It was not a successful venture and partly for that reason these poems evoke a melancholy and display a strong influence of Vedantic philosophy.

Apart from Sikhism and Vedanta, Puran Singh seems to be influenced by Buddhism and Christianity. Time and again one comes across references to grace and charity of Christianity and the compassion of a Buddhist Bhikku in his writings.

SSS

And yet he did not remain uninfluenced by Marx and the revolutionary change that came about in the Soviet Union when

he was actively engaged in his writings. In *Spirit of the Sikhs*, his magnum opus published by the Punjabi University posthumously in three volumes recently, Puran Singh observes:

> Everywhere we see ignorance, misery, struggle, distress, hunger, disease, death, treachery, deception and parasitism, the strong robbing the poor. In all conscience, to call this dark world something admirable, to be in any way thankful for, seems to be the height of human imbecility and impotence. To feel that we are cooped under the lid of the sky like the chicken brood destined for someone's food, is surely not a prospect pleasing to any serious contemplator of life.

He finds Marx echoing what his mentor Guru Nanak had upheld: "The lowest is equal with the highest in race as in creed in political right as in religious hope." He seems to identify Sikh idealism with the new Soviet order.

KSD

Mohan Singh (1899–1984)

Mohan Singh, a university man who had adopted the eponym of 'Diwana', was an intellectual of the classical tradition. Subordinating the material to the metaphysical, he often adopted anti-intellectual poses. A brilliant scholar, polyglot with a mastery of English and Persian and working knowledge of Sanskrit and Arabic, he tried his hand at almost every genre, poetry, drama, short story, and general prose. Situated favourably, as a teacher of Punjabi at the University of Punjab, Lahore, in the beginning of the modern era when writers in Punjabi had very imperfect knowledge of Persian and English, he was proud of his versatility and claimed to be the first in writing one-act plays, short stories, lyrics and essays in Punjabi. Well-versed in Vedanta, Yoga Shastra, Sufism, and Guru Bani, he could not help criticising the social mores of his time from a metaphysical point of view. His first published work is *Dhup Chhan* (Light and Shade), a collection of lyrics and small poems, then came *Nil Dhara* (Blue Stream) in 1931, which shows some virtuosity in technique as well as flashes of original thinking. His third collection of poems is *Jagat Tamasha* (Variety Show of the World), whose title is taken from a line of Guru Gobind Singh, whose philosophical thought Mohan Singh claims to have imbibed. He published in verse (couplets) a collection under the title of *Nirankari Sakhian* (Tales From the Life of Guru

Nanak), which is entirely traditional in form as well as content. He published also *Masti* (Ecstasy), a collection of quatrains in the manner of Omar Khayyam.

His major achievement lies in literary research of which he may be said to be a pioneer in the field of Punjabi literature. Probably from this field he has acquired a proclivity for the *Apabhramsha* forms of words and phrases which he uses in his writings in preference to both modern and classical forms, imparting a peculiar quaintness and artificiality to his diction. His major research work, *History of Punjabi Literature*, first published in 1935 is still greatly valued as a secondary source book.

SSS

Diwan Singh Kalepani (1894-1944)

Diwan Singh 'Kalepani' is best known as a successor to Prof. Puran Singh in writing free verse in Punjabi. He lacks the classical and mystical quality of Puran Singh, but his approach to social and individual problems is bold and direct, though his sensibility is too romantic for the modern age. He published his first collection of poems, *Vagade Pani* (Flowing Waters) in 1938, which received much attention. He was killed by the Japanese when they occupied the Andamans at Port Blair, where he was employed as a medical officer, for refusal to transfer his loyalty to them. Some of his later poems have been made available in *Antim Lehran* (The Last Ripples) published by his son in 1982.

The tone and quality of his verse can best be appreciated from the following lines:

> The cup of life was filled to over-brimming.
> Trying to overflow every moment, this brimful cup of life
> Desired to overflow on some half-blown, beautiful bud,
> That lay in wait for it
> With face turned upwards.

SSS

Avtar Singh Azad (1906-1972)

Of the minor Punjabi poets Avtar Singh Azad, is most deserving of notice. He had published before independence four collections

of poems, *Swant Bundan* (Drops of Bliss), *Savan Pinghan* (The Swings of Savan), *Vishva Vedna* (Plight of the World) and *Kansoan* (Intimations), and published a translation of the *Rubaiyat* of Omar Khayyam under the title of *Khayyam Khumari* (Inebriations of Khayyam). His style is rhetorical in the way of most Urdu poetry. The influence of Bhai Vir Singh is visible, too, in some of his poems like *Jivan ki Hai?* (What is Life?) and *Atak* (Hindrance) in which there is a pun on the name of the river Indus when it passes southwards between the Frontier Province and West Punjab of Pakistan and has a reference to the legend of Maharaja Ranjit Singh crossing it on horseback at the head of the Khalsa army. Though modern nationalist and socialist ideas find expression in many of his poems, he is on the whole traditional in both form and content. For instance, on the one hand, he writes of the factory worker:

> The workers are going home,
> After wrestling the whole day with machines,
> Having drained their blood for a few coins,
> Bathed with perspiration and dust,
> Looking at the factory's chimneys,
> With a desperate frown,
> The workers are going home.

And on the other hand, he can write of the Sutlej:

> The Sutlej flows in waves of clear water,
> Every drop of which has the effect of nectar.

He earned more renown as a poet after 1947 with collections such as *Jivan Nad* (The Music of Life) and *Son Sikhran* (Golden Summits), 1958. He describes his dream of the new age:

> I see the advent of the new era,
> beautiful and heart-winning,
> A new dawn lovelier than all the reds of sunrise.

He also feels, however, that his dream of freedom is very imperfect:

> The land is free today, but unequal scales
> Yet continue the old unjust division.

During this period he published a translation of Guru Gobind

Singh's Persian poem, *Zafar Nama* (The Epistle of Victory) and also the *Meghaduta* of the great Sanskrit poet Kalidas. His greatest poetic achievement can be seen in his three epic poems *Mard Agammara* (The Unparalleled Man) about Guru Gobind Singh, *Vishva Nur* (Light of the World) about Guru Nanak and Mahabali (Man of Great Prowess), Maharaja Ranjit Singh. However, in his patriotic admiration for his heroes, he perhaps outsteps the limits of historical reality.

SSS

Giani Gurmukh Singh 'Musafir' (1899–1976)

Giani Gurmukh Singh 'Musafir' was widely popular in his time. His admirers would trudge hundreds of miles to listen to him recite his poems. He was in great demand in every cultural, political or religious gathering of his day. He ranked amongst the stalwarts of the "stage-poets" of his time—Hira Singh 'Dard', Feroz Din 'Sharaf', Vidhata Singh 'Teer' and Nand Lal 'Nurpuri'. He continued to be admired and remained in great demand when the next generation of the so-called "stage-poets" came on the scene. Better known among this team were Hazara Singh 'Mushtaq', Teja Singh 'Sabir', Jaswant Rai 'Rai', Gurdev Singh 'Mann', Darshan Singh 'Awara', Hazara Singh 'Gurdaspuri', Barkat Ram 'Yuman', and Bishan Singh 'Upashak'. It goes to the credit of a work like *Door Nede* that he can with equal justification rank with Dhani Ram 'Chatrik', Avtar Singh 'Azad', Mohan Singh, Bawa Balwant, Pritam Singh 'Safeer', and Gopal Singh 'Dardi'.

Giani Gurmukh Singh Musafir's first poem that caught the people's imagination at Akal Takht, the highest seat of the Sikh community, had these oft-quoted lines in it:

> Get ready and let us go to Guru ka Bagh
> And see for ourselves the memorial of the Guru.
> Pay our homage and kiss the spot
> And witness with our own eyes the deeds heard of.

According to Professor Mohan Singh, 1921 is a turning-point in Punjabi letters. Punjabi poetry that was essentially social and metaphysical in content under Bhai Vir Singh's all-pervading influence, turned a new leaf. It came to be involved more and more in political problems engaging the people's attention. The

Sikhs were locked in a grim struggle with the white rulers on one score or another. Mahatma Gandhi had already made his impact on the national scene. Inevitably the agitations launched by the Sikhs became a part of the national struggle for independence. The process that started with the Jallianwala Bagh tragedy in 1919 was precipitated with Guru ka Bagh, culminating in Jawaharlal Nehru's arrest in Nabha in 1923. Giani Hira Singh 'Dard' and Giani Gurmukh Singh 'Musafir' played a significant role in it. And both of them were poets of considerable talent at that time.

As a poet, Giani Gurmukh Singh 'Musafir' stands at the crossroads of Punjabi writing. Starting his poetic career with poems written in praise of the Sikh Gurus for recitation in Gurudwaras on occasions of anniversaries and festivals, he took a big leap forward, plunging into the freedom struggle and writing poetry dripping with patriotic fervour. Utterly secular in his outlook all his life, even his latest collection *Door Nede* has a poem addressed to Guru Gobind Singh: "Tera akhaun to menum sankoch hai" (I dare not claim I belong to you). The poem ends with these lines:

Clothe the naked
Feed the hungry
Provide shelter to the shelterless
Either come Yourself
Or convince those
Who function in Your name
That You reside in every heart
That the poor man's mouth is Your offering's chest
That the need of the needy is Your need.

Giani Gurmukh Singh 'Musafir' was essentially a man with a progressive outlook. Even when he wrote in praise of the Sikh Gurus and the Sikh religion, there was nothing sectarian or communal about his writing. He had faith in the oneness of God and subscribed to the view that He could be reached by any path. All religions upheld a common truth. All roads led to the same goal:

Let him come from any approach
He'll find Me through any path.

Literary critics classify patriotic poetry as *Des Prem di Kavita* (Poetry of Love for the Motherland) and *Des Bhakti di Kavita* (Poetry of Devotion to the Motherland). Giani is said to belong to

the latter category. He loved his country, he was devoted to his motherland but there is no chauvinism about it. He has written poems about his country "Mera Desh" and "Mera Watan". He has written a poem about the Punjab, 'Punjab—Wand ton pehlon'. He has written a poem about the town he belonged to, "Rawalpindi". And yet more than the land, he loves the people:

I have been a devotee of my motherland
I continue to be intoxicated with its love
Maybe I'll do so the rest of my life
But something keeps on nagging me
My heart is anxious to know
Should I adore my country or my countrymen?

He doesn't rest at that. He has come to believe that the real malady of his countrymen is the ill-distribution of its resources. It is a rich country in which the rich continue to be richer and the poor continue to be poorer:

What is it
That my country doesn't have?
It has everything
But not for everybody.
Flames appear to be flickering out
While wells overflow with oil.
With plenty around
We are poverty-stricken.
Nothing we lack
And yet we are lacking in everything.

But the poem of his earlier period that hoisted Giani Gurmukh Singh 'Musafir' to the pinnacle of glory and which continues to be in demand by his admirers here and abroad is "Bachpan" (Childhood). A longer composition by the prevailing standards, it shows both the poet's maturity of thinking and his felicity with the shorter measure that had just been introduced in Punjabi writing. After Waris Shah's "Heer", it is perhaps the only poem in our secular literature that people came to remember by heart and recite as they would the folk-songs. There is a torrential flow in its rhythm and the simple manner in which the poet makes some far-sighted observations ensures for the poem an abiding place in contemporary Punjabi letters. A single composition like this can make a poet immortal. Sampling an extract at random:

Dhira beat Bira,
Bira's mother scolded him.
Dhira told his mother about it
And then there was a volley of abuses.
They tore each other's hair.
As they finished with their fight,
Bira's mother looked for Bira
Dhira's mother looked for Dhira
With Bira's arm around Dhira's neck
And Dhira's arm around Bira's neck
There they come laughing,
Exuding the purity of their hearts.

A time came in his life when rising above the politics of the Sikh community, Giani Gurmukh Singh 'Musafir' plunged into the national struggle for India's independence under the inspiring leadership of Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru. He came to realise that the social evils in Indian society were mainly the result of British rule. It was, therefore, important that the country was freed from the foreign yoke first. A man of great faith in his organisation, he was convinced that independence must be won sooner than later:

Before long the world will see
This side and that will change places.
Let there be any other change or not,
This government of ours must change.

After India became independent, Gianiji was loaded with various political responsibilities including the Chief Ministership of the Punjab reorganised on the basis of language, a demand for which the people of the Punjab had fought for long. However, he found time for his creative writing and participation in literary and cultural activities in India and abroad.

Giani Gurmukh Singh 'Musafir' lived a many-splendoured life. Full of honours, shouldering grave responsibilities, moving from glory to glory. And yet his heart was elsewhere. He had little use for political recognition. In his poem "Leedri di Phik" (The Futility of Leadership), he says:

If you wish to enjoy the pure air of poetry
You must give up dabbling in the dirt of politics.

It is amazing how a poet who was nurtured in traditional poetry, one who could not claim to have any close familiarity with new trends of writing, inevitably changed his diction, his metres and his manner. While on one hand, he wrote brilliant *rubais* (quatrains) in the manner of the old masters—and he has a whole collection of them entitled *Sehj Seti* (In the Stride)—on the other hand he wrote poetry on some of the most modern themes in new form, keeping pace with his times:

I said prayers and read holy books
I remembered God no end,
I visited temples, mosques and gurudwaras
And sang His praises
Every man's heart is a temple,
If it is hurt, you should think
You worship one
And defile another.

Luckily for me, they thought
I am a lunatic
And this one fact
Helped me get rid of the whole world.
Everyone says, "He is mad,
It's no fault of his",
What a fine excuse
I have found for myself!

Here is a piece from a poem with modern format; the racy metre, conversational measure, new diction, the idiom of "the brave new world". Gianiji wrote this poem on the martyrdom of Jatindra Nath Das:

When he was alive, it was easy,
He lived in a single body.
Now he is not one, nor two,
Nor three, nor four nor five nor a hundred.
If you wish to arrest him
He is now thirty-three crores
No, more than that
There is no end to him
Catch him now, arrest him.
Whom would you catch? Whom would you arrest?

Long before Mohan Singh came on the scene, it goes to the credit of Giani Gurmukh Singh 'Musafir' for investing Punjabi poetry with social consciousness. Rather than remaining preoccupied with God and the ultimate problems of life and death, he reacted to the contemporary situation and talked about what interested the common man around him. This gave new meaning to his poetry and lent it a form that could best do justice to it.

KSD

Mohan Singh (1905–1978)

Mohan Singh is the harbinger of the age of Punjabi poetry that can be called truly modern because of its freedom from all revivalist orientalism and so-called modern mysticism. As stated earlier, he sprang from the soil prepared by the post-war freedom struggle. The first collection of his poems, *Save Pattar* (Green Leaves) was published in 1935. It included four longish poems, *Basant, Nur Jahan, Anarkali* and *Rab* (God), published a year earlier in a small volume, titled *Char Hanjhu* (Four Tears). The tone of these poems is strongly reminiscent of 19th century English romantic poetry. In the first poem he pays a memorial tribute to his first wife, Basant, who died young in the early years of their married life. Basant appears to him in a dream, and Mohan Singh acknowledges her as the inspiration behind his poetic activity, when he makes her say:

> Mohan, how could you have become a poet,
> had I not died?

The second poem similarly describes the love of Emperor Jahangir for Nur Jahan in its splendid glory, though the downfall of Nur Jahan after Jahangir's death is also referred to, as seen in the epitaph on her modest grave on the bank of the Ravi. The third poem, *Anarkali*, narrates the tragic love of the courtesan for Salim (the name of Jahangir when he was still a prince), who responded with the same intensity of emotion but could not save her from the wrath of his father, Akbar the Great, who ordered her to be bricked alive in a wall for her refusal to forswear the prince's love. In the fourth poem he refers to the mystery and inscrutability of God and the vain efforts of sages and Sufis to fathom the mystery. He begins by saying:

The intellect has lost its wings in searching for Thee
Thinking has become hollow in reflecting about Thee
Hundreds and thousands of fingers have tried to
unravel Thy locks
Not a hair has, however, become straight.

And ends with

If Thou liftest Thy locks from Thy face,
The whole world will look at Thee in wonder!

Other poems in the collection that have become household songs of the people of the Punjab are 'Sikhi ki Hai'? (What is Sikhism?), 'Ambi da Buta' (The Mango Tree), 'Sipahi da Geet' (The Song of a Soldier), 'Khuh di Gaddi' (The Driver's Seat on the Persian Wheel). These poems reveal a sensibility which is still feudal and for that reason they are exceedingly popular, so that hundreds and thousands of Punjabis know Mohan Singh only as the author of *Save Pattar.*

The second volume named *Kasumbhara* (The Red Oleander) reveals the influences that Mohan Singh imbibed at the Khalsa College, Amritsar. The movement of progressive literature, inaugurated in 1934 by Russian, English and French men of letters and learning like Gorky, E.M. Forster, Aldous Huxley, Thomas Mann, as a liberal protest against Hitler's Nazism that threatened to drown the European people in blood and destroy the two-thousand-year-old Western civilization, was eagerly taken up by Indian writers and intellectuals like Mulk Raj Anand, Munshi Prem Chand, Sajjad Zahir for its anti-imperialist plank and advocacy of freedom in general from religious obscurantism and feudal oppression. In the Punjab the movement brought forth societies of progressive writers particularly in Lahore and Amritsar under the inspiration provided by Dr. Mohammad Din 'Tasir' and others. At Amritsar where Dr. Tasir was principal of the Muslim Anglo-Oriental College, he and Sahibzada Qayum Zafar, his wife Rashid Jahan, and Faiz Ahmed Faiz, who was yet a budding poet, were joined by Mohan Singh in a branch of the Progressive Writers' Association. Faiz Ahmed Faiz and Mohan Singh were to become leading poets of Urdu and Punjabi, respectively.

Mohan Singh then teaching at the Khalsa College imbibed deeply the influence of English poets like C. Day Lewis, W.H. Auden, and Stephen Spender which led him to study and

admire W.B. Yeats and T.S. Eliot, among poets and Aldous Huxley and D.H. Lawrence among novelists and the leftist highbrow and intellectual elitism of which Marx and Freud were the main sources of inspiration. Mohan Singh shared fully this influence so that the poems of *Kasumbhara* are replete with concepts derived from Marx and Freud. For instance, in *Taj Mahal*, Mohan Singh deprecates that beauty which arose from the hunger and death of ill-paid and overworked labourers. In other poems the Freudian overtones are indeed very loud. But there is a section that is devoted to contemporary social and political problems like Hindu-Muslim unity as in *Ao Nachiye* (Come and Dance), and *Jag Jag O Jawana* (Wake Up, Youth) in which he says:

> You still sing songs,
> Songs of your great ancestors,
> While your coevals
> Russian, Chinese, Japanese
> Have vindicated their youth,
> Are you not ashamed?
> Pride of ancient culture
> Does not convince the stronger.

Kasumbhara was followed two years later by another collection by the name of *Adhvate* (Half-Way). In these poems Mohan Singh talks about love which was only half requited. And the political situation in the country was also only half hopeful to lovers of freedom. So the partial response in both spheres gave him the feeling of standing half-way on the road to his desired consummation. In the title poem he expresses this feeling:

> What if my love stands halfway?

The same Freudian and Marxian overtones are heard in other poems which are somewhat more subtle and sophisticated.

In the next collection entitled *Kach Such* (Tinsel and Truth), Mohan Singh is aware that his Marxist revolutionary leanings are strongly contaminated with romantic and emotional anxiety and instability. The poems in which this instability has been overcome, he calls by the name of truth, while the others that are romantic and sentimental are tinsel. In "Do Totian de Vich Bhon Vandi," he divides present-day society into two sections, one of the people

(*Lok*) and the other of parasites or leaches (*Jok*). In another poem "Mur ke Mauli Dharat Chin de" (The Chinese earth has grown green again), he celebrates the Chinese Revolution of 1948. In some poems like "Loha" (Iron) and "Dharat banasi Lohe di" (The Earth will turn into Iron), he celebrates the armed might of the socialist society. For instance, in "Loha" he writes:

> With the help of iron we have conquered so many lands,
> With the help of iron we have overarched the skies,
> Armed with steel we are coming soon.

In this poem he also calls iron the father and mother of the revolution. Of course, here Mohan Singh does not refer specifically to the armed might of the so-called socialist camp, but also to its great industrial and technological progress so that in the peaceful competition between capitalism and socialism, the latter will triumph, as per the formula made popular later by Khruschev. But some accuse the poet of over-emphasizing the power of technology and positing that socialism will triumph on the basis of superior technology rather than superior ideology. In a later poem he cites the prophecy in the *Quran* which says;

> On the eve of Doom, the sun will come down to
> a rope's length
> from the Earth which will then be burnt into iron.

But Mohan Singh's emphasis is on the point of 'no more these insects within insects,' meaning that the chains of exploitation will be broken. Hence, there is an allusion to the use of the expression by Guru Nanak, though in a different context which says that God creates insects within insects, thus transferring the existence of sin from high to low.

Though outwardly Mohan Singh betrays a proclivity towards physical love and the emotional instability of the romantic temperament, he tries to restore the balance by positing reality as a rival of romance:

> This heart is not a plaything so cheap,
> That to please the whim of a girl it should
> become alien to the whole world.
> Agreed that one should not allow thick
> growth of passion on the soil of the heart,
> But why should it be so barren that nothing
> but your love should grow on it?

In another poem he describes the world in those days as a fair but weak woman contracting her limbs in the embrace of ugly intoxicated devils, referring to the universal fear of aggression by the Fascist dictators, Hitler and Mussolini, whom he compares to the medieval warlords, Chengiz Khan and Attila.

In *Vadda Vela* (Early Morning) which won the Sahitya Akademi Award, Mohan Singh carries his probe into truth, which according to him resides in socialism. After independence, the nationalist government in India did not quite come up to the expectations of the common people. The Socialist and Communist parties and groups had parted company with the Indian National Congress during the Second World War for different reasons; the Socialists because they thought the Congress had failed to take advantage of the situation created by the World War and Communists because they found the Government rather lukewarm in turning the achievement of independence into a democratic revolution. The Communists particularly accused the Indian National Congress of having made a compromise with imperialism. In the Telangana region of the native state of Hyderabad of those days, the Communists started a kind of armed action against the Nizam's Government and the Indian Government supported the Nizam in this. There was similar trouble in the native States of Punjab, then grouped into a 'B' class state anagrammatically called PEPSU, and in some regions in Bengal and Assam, thus alienating the sympathies of a large body of progressive-minded people.

About the same time there occurred an armed confrontation between North Korea which had gone Communist under the aegis of the Soviet Union and South Korea under an anti-Communist regime bolstered up by the United States. North Korea had succeeded in overrunning nearly the whole of South Korea when the USA intervened with all its might so that the North Koreans were thrown back right up to the common border with Communist China. At this stage Communist China launched an avalanche of manpower so that the American forces were sent back reeling into South Korea. Disconcerted at this near defeat of his armies, the President of the United States, John Truman, began to issue threats to use the atom bomb against the North Koreans as they had done against Japan in 1945. In the West and in global politics a cold war was raging between the Soviet Union and Communist China on the one hand

and the United States and its allies, on the other. Frightened at the prospect of an atomic attack by the US on its opponents, men of goodwill and liberal-minded intellectuals in Europe organized a movement for peace at all costs since the atomic power of the USA was a one-sided threat. Large sections of the Indian people responded to this appeal for peace in which the Communists were quick to take the lead. Progressive-minded teachers at the Khalsa College including Mohan Singh turned their energies into promoting the movement for world peace and Mohan Singh's genius burst into an efflorescence of songs for peace and along with it a glorification of the Communist-led actions in Telangana and other such incidents in which the national government allowed itself to be caught on the wrong foot. Poems written under the inspiration of these events form the bulk of poems in *Vadda Vela* and the next volume entitled *Awazan* (Voices), which by its name implies a populist protest. A couple of stanzas from a 'peace' poem written at this stage rendered into English run as under:

Drive out of your mind the idea of war, O dear,
Only the evil spirits haunting our minds may die
in this death imposed by others.
Rise and gather under the flag of peace,
Otherwise this world cannot be saved.
There is no knowing when the militarists may
open the gates of Hell.

In *Vadda Vela* Mohan Singh's poems can be put into three groups, one, in which memories and frustrations of personal love echo his despair; for instance, in the title poem, when he says:

O star of morning,
Why is your being all a-tremble?
If your journey is long,
Friend, our griefs are also long.
O star of the morning,
Give your ear to what I say,
If it were candy it could be distributed,
Friend, but pain cannot be shared.

In another poem he wants love to be more than remembrance:

How long can one live on memories
If love does not come in person.
Mere remembrance though full of colour,
Desire and fragrance,
Brings also pricks and pains.

The second group consists of poems pleading for collective action. In 'Amal' (Action) he says:

Rise, for rising is the first step in living,
Walk, for walking is the first stage on life's journey.
If it awakens, a stone can become a jewel,
If unaware it remains but a chip.

The challenge of revolution is put in words like:

Comrade, the stream of life will not swell without struggle,
Sleeping waters don't throw out their impurities.
But when the waves of the ocean become turbulent
They throw out useless shells on the shore.
Iron cannot be cleared of its burnt rust
So long as the sparks don't turn from red to white.

In *Trishul* (The Trident), he deprecates romantic love and our feudal economic system in which the worker and the peasant lead a dog's life. He exhorts them to collect pen and hammer and sickle to make a powerful trident so that labour may achieve victory over oppression. The *ghazals* in this collection also have a new content with political overtones.

In *Awazan,* the revolutionary intent is expressed still more powerfully. The heroes of labour are celebrated as forging the new weapon of revolution. In *Mangli,* the heroine of the Telangana struggle of the Andhra people against the Nizam of Hyderabad and in Gajjan Singh, the hero of the tenants' struggle for land in the state of PEPSU, are celebrated. In "Rosenburg" he describes the news on the radio of the execution of the Rosenburg couple in the United States for the alleged offence of imparting nuclear secrets to the Soviet Union, pulsating with sobs and sighs, of the nature of personal bereavement. In "Songs of Peace and of Youth", and in "Jattian da Git" (Song of the Peasant Women) he has given voice to the revolutionary urges of the time. The third group is of a traditional type and tone; for instance, in a *ghazal* he says:

Come that I may give you my whole life's earnings,
Come that I may fill you up to the brim with the
wealth of my heart.

Or as in 'Saver' (Morning)

Without a face like the dawn
What use are mornings?
You send your memories but do not come yourself,
This is no consolation.

In a slim volume entitled *Jai Mir* (Victory to Peace), the main content is supplied by a longish poem of the same name and there are other poems in the same strain as if to supply a retinue. ('Mir' is the Russian word for peace as also for the world.) Fittingly enough, this collection won for Mohan Singh the Soviet Land Nehru Award.

Jandare (Locks), 1975, is a collection of poems that express Mohan Singh's ageing spirit in which revolutionary fervour and romantic passion are subdued by the wisdom of age. But the artistic quality has not declined by any means. The title poem, "Jandare", is a pretext word of consolation to the ageing lover who believes that love has not cooled in the heart of the beloved, only her lips and his are locked by consideration for the beloved's two children moving about. In another poem, "Mansur," the poet relates a legend from Egypt, of a Faqir Mansur who once turned back the flood in the Nile by throwing before the advancing tide his cloak, and suggests to the beloved that if in her ageing heart now the passion of love may rise again, she may subdue it by remembering him. The despair of old age is beautifully expressed in some other poems also as, for instance, in the following lines:

The horses of the chariot of sunset,
Hard-mouthed and headstrong would not be restrained.
I am tired of and defeated with pulling rein O my life.
I strained to catch the lapel of the sunset,
It spread the mist of colours, O my life.
The breeze of dawn has gone back after knocking
at the door.
Who has put locks on it, O my life?

This collection consists of eleven short poems, one long poem and twenty-four *ghazals*. The short poems are all full of regret at

life's incomplete success. In "Sakhani Ghari" (The Empty Hours), the poet speaks of the sunset with its amazing colours and compares it to a woman, but the hour has gone in vain. Similarly, the night is a cow with its udder over-flowing with milk and yet the milkpot has not been filled. The midnight is a young woman adorned with bright jewellery and yet the hour passes unavailed. In the morning comes the young woman to the grove with smiles on her lips and saffron on her hair. But even this moment passes in vain.

Old age is a tree with more thorns than leaves and a hollow stem. It drinks not a drop of water but a lot of blood. The poet does not know whether it is a real tree or an illusion of one.

The *ghazals* also express the same sentiment. The poet does not want the thrice-distilled cup to be snatched from him, for there is life yet in his hands. He has witnessed the power of the sword but the shield of peace is not yet lost. The question is not what has been answered in parts, but of why it yet remains unanswered. In some poems hope braces up, hope for humanity which has crossed space, eaten the loaf of the moon, for the workers who have churned the ocean and extracted fourteen gems. The world is yet looking the way of him who will shoot the target of the pole star and pass on. The long poem, a free translation of a Persian original, and entitled "Madan te Kamudi" (Proper names symbolic of Love and Desire) again symbolises the poet's unending aspiration. It relates how in the court of a Persian king a young musician, Madan, created such a powerful effect with his music that the king threw at him his invaluable necklace as a reward. And then the court dancer, Kamudi, began to dance to his music with such magic madness that everyone of the courtiers parted with his jewelled necklace to gift it to her. Madan, too, was so affected that he gifted to her the necklace that the king had given him. At this the king was highly incensed and ordered his men to carry Madan away to some place in the desert from where he could not return to any habitation. Madan gone mad with love keeps wandering in the desert calling for Kamudi in the bushes and trees as well as birds and animals in the desert. At last he comes to a holy date tree and keeps calling for Kamudi with such passion that all the birds chirpings seemed to call for Kamudi alone! The meaning is obvious. The poet has loved so constantly and intensely both a person and a cause that space and time cannot remain unaffected.

Mohan Singh had translated at an early period of his career Edwin Arnold's *Light of Asia* into Punjabi verse with such success that the translation is about as good as the original, perhaps more lyrical at places, according to the genius of the Punjabi language. In 1975 the Punjabi University, Patiala, published his Mahakavya or epic on the life of Guru Nanak. Both the narrative and descriptive portions of this epic reveal Mohan Singh's genius at its best. The difficulty arises when he has to render the account of miracles and other supernatural events from the traditional *Janam Sakhis* into a modern idiom demanding rationality. But he deftly circumvents the difficulty by attributing the account to the writers of the *Janam Sakhis*, saying, "So says the writer of the Sakhi".

The next volume, *Buhe* (Doors) 1976, reveals a new hope like the brightness of a flickering flame, but the intimations of the impending end can be heard in lines such as:

> The waters of pools
> Are drying up, drying up, drying up.
> The chariots of the stars
> Are coming to a halt, to a halt, to a halt.
> Those intoxicated with pride and vanity
> The blood flowing swift and hot,
> Are bowing down, bowing down, bowing down.

There is a philosophy behind Mohan Singh's emotionalism which is beautifully expressed in lines like:

> Stop talking of patching up the skies,
> Say something about the welfare of this earth.
> We could not catch properly even the moment;
> Do not talk of prevailing over ages.
> If you want that it should take a step on the sun
> Say something to set afire the heart of dust.
> There was nothing wrong in Adam eating the grain of wheat
> If it had not been unequally distributed.
> There is now a weapon stronger than love
> But Sultans have to be convinced of it.
> Come to the public house, perhaps we will be able
> To rise equal to the occasion after a peg or two.

Darshan Singh 'Awara' (1906–1982)

Darshan Singh 'Awara' started writing verse under the impulse of the struggle for freedom in the early twenties. The tone and diction of these poems were nationalist revolutionary and they were first published in a volume named *Bijli di Tarak* (The Lap of Lightning). It was confiscated by the British Government. A second volume was published many years later in 1940 under the title *Baghavat* (Rebellion), followed in 1941 by *Main Baghi Han* (I am a Rebel). The rebellion at this stage has gone from mere political defiance of the British rulers to the more fudamental spiritual rebellion against the belief in an all-pervading divinity and the principles and tactics of institutional religion. 'Awara' sees the variety of religions in India as obstacles in the way not only of the national struggle for freedom but also of basic humanity. As when he writes:

> Where no man lives but he is Muslim or Christian
> Or Hindu or Sikh, or Jain, Sunni or Mirza
> Tell me, my brother, if such a land may not go to nothing else but ruin.

SSS

Harinder Singh 'Rup' (1907–1954)

Harinder Singh 'Rup' is a poet of what may be called the neo-classical tradition in which emotion remains subdued. He published his poems in collections entitled *Navan Pandh* (New Paths), 1945 and *Dunghe Vahin* (Deep Streams), 1947. In fact, 'Rup' does not break any new ground in the style or content of his poetry; the subject as well as technique is traditional. In *Dunghe Vahin*, there is indeed maturity and depth. 'Rup' a scion of a Bhai family that enjoyed much respect and honour and some power at the court of Maharaja Ranjit Singh was an amateur student of classical painting and had a well-formed taste in matters of painting and architecture.

His talent has expressed itself better in what are called *Vars* or Lays which were published in collections like *Shanan Mere Punjab Dian* (The Glories of My Punjab), *Lok Varan* (Lays of the People), *Manukh de Var* (The Lay of Man) and *Himalaya di Var* (The Lay of the Himalayas). The last-named was published after his death. *Manukh di Var* narrates the history and evolution of civilisation. In *Himalaya di Var* the Himalayan range is the hero, and it describes

the pitiable condition of people living at the foot of these mountains with suggestions about improving their lot. The section about the marriage of the God Siva is full of humour. In *Sann Santali de Var* (The Lay of the Year 1947), he has described on a grim note the tragic events that took place in the aftermath of independence.

SSS

Devinder Satyarthi (b 1908)

Devinder Satyarthi is a gifted writer. He is perhaps best known as a collector of folk-songs in search of which he travelled for years to different parts of India. In 1936, he published *Gidha*, a collection of Punjabi folk-songs, which attracted great attention. Later he published his own poems in various collections—*Dharati Dian Vazan* (Echoes of the Earth), *Murhaka te Kanak* (Sweat and Wheat) 1950, *Buddhi Na Hoyi Dharti* (The Earth is Never Old) and *Lak Tundu Tundu* (The Doves' Songs), 1958. The influence of folk-songs is evident in these poems. He takes many of his allusions and references from folk poetry. Satyarthi's concern for the people ranks him with progressive poets, though he has no political leanings or affiliations. He just sings of the people in the way they sing of themselves. He partakes of the joy and misery of the common people:

> Why do our innards cry and wail?
> Why do our wants falsify our dreams?
> If our hungers grow and the wheats fail,
> The lays of the 'haves' and 'have-nots' will grow long.

There is a surprising combination of the old and the new, of tradition and experiment, a mixture of humanist, progressive and nationalist elements in Satyarthi that gives his poetry a modern touch.

SSS

Anoop Singh (1910–1989)

Anoop Singh was a lawyer by profession, hailing from the North-West Frontier Province of undivided Punjab.

A lover of every good thing in life, he came to writing poetry seriously very late in life but his output compensated his late-coming both quantitatively and qualitatively. The most striking feature of his verse is his thought-content. Evidently, he owes this

to his age; maturity of outlook on life, wealth of experience, and the asset of erudition that he gathered over the years. An admirer of Saadi and Hafiz, Meer and Ghalib, Iqbal and Faiz, he was equally knowledgeable about the Vedas and the Upanishads, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. The poet in Anoop Singh refused to tread the trodden path. Krishna had no attraction for him, nor did he dance attendance on Radha. His destination was beyond the so-called heaven. An angel for too long, he wished to be human for once. According to the poet, Man is supreme. A human being is greater than any deity.

I have realized myself
Why must I repeat the name of Rama?
The paths, which have been trodden
Why must I go that way?
I won't like to be a Krishna
And dance attendance on Radha.
My destination is beyond the heaven
Why must I waver and stumble?
I have been a God many a time
I would like to be human once.

He goes a step further and confronts God immodestly—'Why had Guru Arjan to be carried away by the waves of the river Ravi?', 'Why was Guru Tegh Bahadur slaughtered in Delhi?', 'For what fault did the entire family of Guru Gobind Singh have to be wiped out?', 'People die with Your name on their lips! How is it that the prayers of your devotees are never heard?' Says the poet:

Those who love You suffer
With Rama on their tongue they die
How do You explain it all?
What type of God are You?

Similarly, he finds fault with Heer. Why could she not embrace death the way Sohni and Sahiban did when separated from their lovers? He would not have the erotic figures at Konark mar the exquisite beauty of its architecture. An angry old man, no doubt! However, what is gratifying in him is the remarkable mirror-like portrayal of the subtle in the beauty of nature.

When face to face with such poignant charm, the rebel in Sardar Anoop Singh is subdued. He submits to the Divine Reality for its uncanny creativity:

The rivers sing nursery rhymes
And the mountains are asleep
Who is the creator of all this
The one who lives in every particle?

He has half a dozen collections of poems. More important among them are: *Aad Aneel, Roop-Anup,* and *Akhar Birkh.* He maintains the idealism and the excellence of expression typical of a senior poet. He asks many a question:

Why this creation?
Since when is it there?
How long and how wide?
And how far does it spread?

And he is bewildered since no reply seems to be forthcoming even at his advanced age, with his vast and varied experience:

The more I cover the distance,
The more the path is involved.

Anoop Singh's regret is that he is too simple and too straightforward, while the world around him has grown much too sophisticated. Nobody seems to be available any more on his wavelength:

My words are simple
No more the world understands the straight talk.

He makes an endeavour to carry his reader back to Nature, to its original, unblemished, pristine purity. Where he can embrace trees and lie on the naked earth with a rock as his cushion. Where relaxing on the bank of a river under the shade of trees he can drink its water to his heart's content. Where singing with birds and swimming with fish, he can wash away the squalor of life:

If I had a moment's peace from pain
I would like to do what I long for
I would take the trees to my bossom
And sleep with stones as my pillows.

KSD

Prem Singh 'Prem' (b. 1914)

Prem Singh 'Prem' is a contemporary of such eminent names in Punjabi poetry as Pritam Singh 'Safeer' and Dr. Gopal Singh

'Dardi', who can boast of utmost proximity to Mohan Singh, the doyen of new Punjabi verse. 'Prem' was a student in Khalsa College, Amritsar along with his two other talented companions when Mohan Singh served on the teaching staff of the College. 'Prem' wrote a lot of poetry and he was a popular name in the world of Punjabi writing until he started dabbling in politics. The more he made exploits in the new field, the less and less he practised writing poetry. By the time he rose to be a cabinet minister in the State, it seems, he completely dried up as a poet. It was unfortunate, to say the least. However, of late, he has been moving more and more towards his maiden love. Not long ago, he reappeared with his collection of poems *Sutta Ishq Jagya* (The Sleeping Love Awakes) and then there was another, *Peed Naroi* (Healthy Pain) confirming the return of the prodigal.

'Prem' does not sneak in apologetically; he makes his entry with a bang. His second volume runs into 192 pages with a glowing introduction by Dr. Mohan Singh 'Diwana', the tallest figure amongst the old masters of Punjabi literature.

The collection comprises two almost equal parts: the first containing *nazms* and the second devoted to *ghazals.*

His new verse has nostalgic memories of old times. There is little reflection on it of the intervening period when a lot of experimentation in Punjabi poetry took place. He writes the way Mohan Singh wrote at one time, and making a long stride, he has landed himself amongst the practitioners of *ghazal*, a phenomenon peculiar to post-Partition Punjabi verse.

'Prem' retains the simplicity and the warmth of the Punjabi folk-song in his poetry. It reminds one of Mohan Singh's immortal lyrics written in Pothoari dialect, close to the soil without any trace of sophistication:

Guru manani aan
Peer manani aan
Rot chadhani aan mandre
Hai je kidhre wat jawan
Mere bhag mathe de chandre.
Is jiwan da ki bharwasa
Chidian rain basera
Saiyo ni ik Sado najoomi
Hath vikha de mera.

The other distinguishing feature of Prem's poetry is its satirical

note. He is subtle. There is a sting in the tail. It reflects his rich experience of life when he was involved up to his neck in politics. His sympathies are as varied as the variety of his experience. "Ik Bian" (A Statement) relates to a poor man who has been arrested for gambling on Diwali day and sentenced to jail by a judge at the instance of a prosecutor both of whom play cards with stakes every evening in the city club. Other poems written in this vein are: "Prashan Chinh" (Question Mark), "Nischit Anischit" (Sure Unsure) and "Do Billian Do Kuttee" (Two Cats and Two Bitches).

Prem Singh 'Prem's' *ghazals* confirm the conviction that *ghazal* as a form of poetry has come to stay in Punjabi writing. It is no more an alien genre that gate-crashed into Punjabi literature because of our nostalgia for Urdu and our anxiety to forge meaningful links with the Punjabi-speaking people across the border. With his maturity of outlook, 'Prem's' grip over this form of poetry has enriched the Punjabi *ghazal* splendidly.

Prem has not been seen for long
It is said he died under the spell of politics

If the poor remain where they are
What will happen to the weak and the deserving?

KSD

Takhat Singh (1914–90)

Takhat Singh entered the field of Punjabi poetry via Urdu in which he commands a considerable reputation. As a consequence of his training in Urdu, he has written mostly *ghazals*. In fact, he has brought the *ghazal* form in Punjabi to maturity. His thinking is influenced mostly by the progressive poets of Urdu and by Mohan Singh. He has published half a dozen collections of *ghazals* in Punjabi entitled *Vangar* (Challenge), *Kav Hilune* (Swings of Poetry), *Hambule* (Flourishes), *Anakh de Phul* (Flowers of Pride) and *Lishkaran* (Flashes).

Takhat Singh is like the progressives an optimist in his social attitudes, and his proficiency in Urdu has added a varied aesthetic dimension to his verse.

SSS

Bawa Balwant (1915–1980)

Bawa Balwant did not receive any university education. His school

education was also very incomplete. Son of poor parents, he happened to be influenced by the literary atmosphere in the shopping centres of Amritsar and was infected with an ambition to write poetry in Punjabi. He diligently studied as much of Punjabi, Hindi and Urdu poetry as he could. His first collection of poems was *Maha Nach* (The Grand Dance) published in 1940. Three other collections, *Amar Geet* (Immortal Song), *Jwalamukhi* (Volcano) and *Bandergah* (Harbour) were brought out up to 1947. His latest poems were published in a collection named *Sugandh Samir* (Fragrant Breeze). No doubt Bawa Balwant's poetry is experiential but the rhetoric of Urdu poetry in Marxist philosophy at the popular level has also greatly influenced him. With his Marxist ideas clothed in oriental rhetoric, he has been able to impress many Left-oriented critics as well as readers. According to a popular leftist critic, "He is an artiste who presents a combination of beauty, ethics and truth in his work. He believes that poets portray the lofty and pure truths of life apparelled in beauty so that.....the heart should play its part in changing life."

In his poem "Bandergah", he has represented his life as a ship in quest of the harbour of love and in many other poems such "Pratham Mel" (First Meeting) and "Aj Hawa Vagadi Rahi" (Today the Wind Kept Blowing), he has presented his idealistic view of love.

But his Marxist beliefs have imparted a rebellious tone to many poems such as "Jawana" (Youth), in which he says, "action alone is reality and truth is the resource of all creation," while on the other hand, in his poem "Mohabbat" (Love), he avers:

> O love, your touch has turned life into light unending.

The best examples of his rhetoric are seen in poems like "Usha" (The Dawn) and "The Himalaya", with lines such as:

> Expanse of universal light, love of day and night
> In the sap of the stars dissolve thousands of colours,
> A Ganga flows out of the great eyes of Shiva's firmament,
> 'O awareness, O dawn, O charioteer of the sun!
> Disperse my darkness.'

SSS

Piara Singh 'Sehrai' (b. 1915)

Piara Singh 'Sehrai' is a contemporary of 'Safeer' and several

other better known poets of today. His verse has an altogether different flavour from the rest of Punjabi poetry that is being written today. It does not have the lyricism of Mohan Singh or the subtlety of 'Safeer' or the sensuousness of Amrita Pritam, or the musicality of Shiv Kumar and yet it is significant writing. More than any other contemporary Punjabi poet 'Sehrai' is preoccupied with what he says, the contents. He is so deeply involved in what he believes that the sheer act of faith gives his utterances the quality of no ordinary verse. He is not scholarly, he is sincere. He is not sophisticated, he is simple. He is not philosophical, he has faith. Beginning his literary career as an admirer of Gur Baksh Singh of *Preet Lari*, he later joined the Progressive Writers' Movement and has remained loyal to it all these years. His preoccupation is social justice. Inequality of opportunities and the exploitation of the have-nots in a tradition-bound society have been bothering him all his life. He is waiting for a new social order:

How is it that his lot is
different from mine?
We belong to the same land
Then why this difference?
Why two seasons at the same time,
Both spring and autumn?
Let us go where no such discriminations obtain.

He has infinite faith in those he believes will change their lot. He challenges the rich and the privileged; he says:

The rich and the exploiter must know
If the establishment is on their side
History is on ours.

Unlike his contemporaries, 'Sehrai' does not talk about the moonlike face of his sweetheart or her cascading fragrant tresses. His concern is with the problems of his time, what one finds in the newspaper. Yet it makes fascinating poetry.

But those looking for intense, delicately beautiful and rarefied pieces of poetry will find plenty of them scattered about in 'Sehrai's' verses.

Along with the formlessness in poetic form, 'Sehrai' has frequently resorted to old moulds of Punjabi poetry such as the *siharfi* and acquitted himself remarkably well. Every time he employs

a traditional form, both his vocabulary and imagery undergo a sea change, lending the variety and beauty of old charm to his poetry. Aside from his *siharfis*, there are ballads and songs in the traditional folk style of which there are seven collections. Some of the well-known ones are *Sehrai Panchhi* (A Bird of Desert), *Tarian di Lau* (The Light of the Stars), *Guzargah* (The Pathway), *Geet Maria Nahin Karde* (The Songs Never Die) and *Meri Atamkatha te Meri Chonwin Kavita"* (My Life and My Selected Verse).

KSD

Pritam Singh 'Safeer' (b. 1916)

Rooted in the soil and classical sensibility and yet remaining abreast of the modern perceptions of the avant-gardists, Pritam Singh 'Safeer' is a unique phenomenon of the forties, the decade known for the proliferation of Punjabi letters. Author of as many as ten collections of poems, he ranks among the most pervasive verse writers of the Punjabi language in recent times.

Born in 1916 at Malikpur in Rawalpindi district, now in Pakistan, 'Safeer's' father Sardar Mehtab Singh who served as headmaster of Shri Guru Arjan Dev Khalsa High School, Taran Taran, was one of the leading Sikh political activists. After graduating from the Khalsa College, Amritsar, he qualified for law. In 1938, he started practice at the Bar at Lahore, then moved to the Delhi Bar after the Partition. In 1969 he rose to become a judge of the Delhi High Court.

His first publication which came out in 1939 was a collection of one-act plays. It was followed by a series of poetry books—*Katak Koonjan* (Swallows of Kartik) in 1941, *Pap de Sohile* (In Praise of Sin) in 1943, *Rakat Boondan* (Drops of Blood) in 1946, *Aad Jugaad* (Ever Eternal) in 1955, *Sarab Kala* (Omnipotent) in 1966, *Guru Gobind* in 1966, *Anik Bistar* (Panoramic Creation) in 1981, *Agam Agochar* (Beyond Reach) in 1981, *Sanjog Vijog* (Union And Parting) in 1982 and then an omnibus volume containing all his works entitled *Sarab Nirantar* (All Pervading) in 1987. The only prose work he has authored in Punjabi is *Dhur ki Bani* (The Song Divine) published in 1975. *Ten Holy Masters and Their Commandments* (1980), *The Tenth Master* (1983) and *A Study of Bhai Veer Singh's Poetry* (1985) are his three prose works in English.

'Safeer' has also been associated with the Punjab and the Punjabi

Universities as a member of the senates and Delhi University as a member of their Board of Punjabi Studies. He led a writers' delegation to Armenia in 1958 and has also served as Founder-Chairman of the Punjabi Writers Industrial Co-operative.

Literary recognition came to him in the shape of various awards including the Shiromani Sahitkar Award of the Punjab Government in 1966, Sahitya Akademi Award in 1983, Sahitya Vicharmanch Award in 1987 and K.S. Dhaliwal Award in 1988.

'Safeer' entered the realm of Punjabi letters with verse of a distinctive character which he has maintained all these years. Stalwarts like Bhai Vir Singh, Mohan Singh, Dhani Ram `Chatrik' with whom he rubbed shoulders failed to influence his style and approach. An island in himself, it has also not been possible for anyone coming after him to emulate him. Though he liberated himself from the rigidities of traditional forms including those of conforming to metre and rhyme, he continues to avail himself of the musicality of rhyme in highly subtle and skilfully fabricated patterns. Having drunk deep at the fountain of thought and idiom of the Sikh scriptures, Safeer's verse has metaphysical overtones and scriptural idiom. At times he gives the impression as if words fail to keep pace with his torrential outburst of emotions. Temperamentally highly impetuous, at times his imagery has a riot of colours.

A great admirer of Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Sikh Guru, he highlights the higher values of truthful living and impeccable conduct of life. There is an unmistakable strain of mysticism in his poetry though he tries his best to retain his feet on the ground and take care of the social reality. No deviation from the determined path, no flirtation with the new-fangled models of the new writing and yet he remains the newest among the new. The familiar unfamiliarity of his thought, his preference for sophistication of expression loaded with personal idiom, more often than not makes his reader pause and ponder over what the poet is trying to say.

With the spiritual strand in his temperament and his preoccupation with metaphysics, he often seems to take a cynical view of love. In his well-known poem "Amritsari Preet", he says:

> The collyrium-dyed eyes of a maid,
> Inset with scenes of love,
> She crossed the Chenab seven times or more,
> With her face like a dove
> She catches hold of the garment of a groom.

Indian mystics believe that it is *ishq majazi* or worlrdly love, that in due course turns into *Ishq haqiqi* or spiritual love. 'Safeer' also seems to follow this dictum, but the craftsman in him is so skilful that his readers hardly ever perceive when he slips from one into the other.

Here is an artiste who arrests with the passion of a mystic the moments of self-confrontation against shadows of the physical love of a common mortal. There is an awareness of a mission in Safeer's poetry, an urge for a higher meaning, the quality of soul. Says he:

Love is destiny,
It is love
That leads one to be a prophet.

("Ishq betaqdir hai")

Millions of Katak months
Dawned and passed off
Millions of birds called "Koonjan"
Having permeated the seasons
With their song, perished
Millions of religions
Millions of nations
Were begotten out of women.

Millions of nights
Having spread across the earth
Were lost into the unseen
Millions of Adams enjoying their Eves
Forgot that death was round the corner.

Millions of lakes brimmed with water
Then dried up and became extinct
Millions of mountains have burst into space,
Millions of prophets, having proclaimed themselves
Have passed away.
The world seeking eternal light
Is still halfway in darkness.

I do not accept
That these stars and universes
Are old, immortal and unique
Millions of gods have suffered extinction
There is no one to remember them.

Like blades of grass
There have been myriads of incarnations
Vishnus, Shivas, Brahmas
Which particular Parvati
Should lament for anyone?

(Translation–'Safeer')

KSD

Gopal Singh (1917–1990)

Gopal Singh, better known in literary circles as 'Dardi', a *nom-de-plume* which in later life he seems to have shed at one time, made a bid to succeed Mohan Singh as a poet along with Pritam Singh 'Safeer', his rival in the track. His drifting to politics seemed to have overshadowed his creative talent to an extent. Nevertheless, his output as a poet with four collections of verse is considerable.

The most characteristic feature of Dr. Gopal Singh's poetry is its non-conformist character. As a poet he is not aligned to any ideology and as an artiste he is utterly uninhibited. One can hear diverse voices in his verse. And each one is at its creative best. A maturity of outlook in content and consummate craftsmanship in form mark his poetic work. At times he sounds an unmitigated romantic:

My love
I've been taken in by you.
At one end I've merged in the Endless
At the other I am all alone.

(Anhad Nad)

Let us see how it contrasts with his cynicism in the same poem:

I loved not only my neighbour
But also his newly wedded wife.
I didn't indulge in felony
Excepting that which is permissible in law
Or is accepted in normal practice.

While he has great respect for discipline of metre and rhyme and as far as possible he conforms to it in actual practice, he has to his credit poems like "Wagah di Sarhad te" (On the Wagah

Border) which are free from any rigidity of form and are notable for their conversational tone and raciness.

He has authored longer poems like "Channan da Pahar" (The Mountain of Light) and "Mard da Chela" (The Devotee of the Hero) that can claim epic dimensions and also short, very short poems which are remarkable in their own way:

It's painful to love
And yet I can't live without love.

(Chanan da Pahar)

It's all quiet
In your absence,
The world is lonely
As sans darkness
Light becomes oppressive.

(Chanan da Pahar)

On one hand he vies with Mohan Singh for his lyrical approach to the subject, on the other hand he is out and out modern in his conception and sensibility keeping pace with the new poetry:

No more are we afflicted with famines and floods
Small-pox or plague,
No more the malarial soil
Soaks our blood.
Some of the more common ailments we suffer from today are
Over-eating, stress and strain and waiting in the queues.

It is a pity that when Dr. Gopal Singh had had his political innings, one looked forward to a more sustained and more thought-provoking poetry from his pen, death took him away.

KSD

Sadhu Singh Hamdard (1918–1985)

Born in a humble village in Doaba, Sadhu Singh Hamdard forged his way ahead against heavy odds. Burning the proverbial midnight oil, he passed his B.A. as a private candidate and then took his LL.B. degree. He followed this by doing his M.A. and then Ph.D. All this while he was working as a journalist to earn his living.

A pioneer in Punjabi journalism, his daily *Ajeet* is not only the most widely circulated paper in the language but is also easily one

of the best produced in the State. With an uptodate printing press, it created a reliable infrastructure for the popular daily to grow and flourish.

A sensitive writer, with a number of published works to his credit, Hamdard excelled in *ghazal*, a genre which he perfected with his copious output. He gave serious thought to whatever he decided to do, and this is illustrated in his *ghazal*-writing. He did systematic research in the form and tradition of the *ghazal* and presented it as a doctoral thesis for his Ph.D.

Hamdard mastered the technique of *ghazal* writing and secured for *ghazal* a respectable place in Punjabi literature. *Ghazal* is essentially a light and lyrical form. It is amazing how a journalist involved in analysing murky politics of the day, could suddenly switch over to romantic utterances normally associated with youthful seasons:

Like counting beads
A day goes and another comes
But those spent in your company
Never come back again.

It is not as though at his mature age Hamdard was completely swept off his feet by the more popular features of *ghazal*-writing, there is wholesome thought-content in his *ghazals*. At times his progressivism is most refreshing:

It has both pain and pleasure
Life is like a book.

The one renders you poor
The other buys love,
I am afraid of both God
And the capitalist.

Hamdard was aware that death is a reality. It must come one day. For that he would not involve himself much in his worldly possessions and finally turned over all his property to a public trust. Did he not say:

Don't you love it, Hamdard
Your life is like a dream.

Recognition came to Hamdard from many quarters. The Government of Punjab honoured him with the 'Shiromani Pattarkar' in 1968 and the Punjabi Sahitya Sameeksha Board with

'Shiromani Khojkar' in 1982. It was followed by the Padma Shri in 1983.

Hamdard was a valiant fighter for the causes dear to his heart. He fought all his life and when the end came, he quietly laid down arms and walked away like a self-respecting soldier that he was.

KSD

Suba Singh (1919–1982)

Suba Singh will be remembered for his sardonic humour, which is seldom hurtful. His remarkable achievement is a modern, ironical version of the love story of Heer and Ranjah, which has gathered round it mountains of sentimentality through the last two or three centuries. Suba Singh tears this sentimentalism to shreds.

SSS

Amrita Pritam (b. 1919)

Amrita Pritam started her literary career in 1936 at the age of seventeen with the publication of a collection of poems entitled *Amrit Laharan* (Ripples of Nectar). The author's name was given as Amrit Kaur. It was some time after her marriage to Pritam Singh that she changed her name to Amrita Pritam. Her early poems are juvenile attempts guided by her father, Kartar Singh 'Hitkari'. The tone is ethical and didactic and the prosody altogether traditional.

She published her next collection of poems, *Jionda Jivan* (Living Life) in 1939, and then came in quick succession *Trel Dhote Phul* (Dew-washed Flowers) in 1941, *O Geetan Valia* (O Song-Maker) in 1943, *Badlan de Palle Vich* (In the Lap of the Clouds) in 1943 and *Sanjh di Lali* (The Red of the Evening) in 1943. These poems are not indicative of maturity, though the tone has changed from didactic to romantic, with platonic overtones. Even the form has become more elastic and modern.

Her next collection, *Lok Peed* (The People's Pain) was published in 1944 by which time Amrita Pritam had come under the influence of the Progressives. In these poems she moves away from romantic love to a revolutionary concern for the people. In one of her poems, she writes:

Talks of beauty and love, O boy,
are things of a time of leisure.

This little poem is about the Great Famine of Bengal in 1942 in which more than a million people died of starvation. It was attributed by most people in India to the inflationary effects of a war economy.

In *Pathar Geete* (Gravel Stones), Amrita's poetry assumes a mature tone of social criticism, and she begins to question the morality of traditional love. In a poem, "Ann Data" (Bread-giver) she portrays a husband as nothing more than one who provides bread to his wife and wants her love in return. But she can give only her body. Her criticism of social morality, especially man-woman relationship, is bold and biting. The poem entitled, "Lahu Mitti" (Blood and Soil) voices the same cynicism about traditional marital relationships.

Amrita Pritam's poetic genius really ripened after 1947 when she began voicing the tragedy of the Partition of the Punjab, at the same time as she welcomed the advent of freedom, in *Lammian Vatan* (Long Marches), 1949. In "Kanakan da Geet" (The Song of Wheat), she gives expression to the tragedy of the Partition:

O the wheat has sprouted,
The wheat has sprouted
But the tales of woe are longer than woe itself.

O the wheat is hoed
The wheat is hoed
The dark spots on my heavens are the same as before:

The well-known and oft-quoted poem, "Aj Akhhan Waris Shah Nu" (I Address Waris Shah Today) expresses the same agony and she cries:

A single daughter of Punjab had wept,
And you wrote a long-drawn elegy of woe,
Today millions of daughters are crying addressing you.

In "Sarghi Vela" (The Time of Dawn), she becomes more and more conscious of the changes taking place in the country; in fact, she is a bit over-optimistic when she says:

A time for which we had waited
for ages has arrived at last.
Those to whom the land belongs
will now take it over.

In keeping with the spirit of the age she has resorted to folk idiom and phrases from the countryside in her poems. For instance in "Jhumar" (The Wheeling Dance) she proclaims:

His is the land, his the crop
Who has ploughed and mowed it.
We belong to it, it belongs to us.
This earth is ours today.
Paddy is beaten thus, O.

Her next collection, *Sunehare* (Messages), 1955 won her the Sahitya Akademi Award. The poems in this collection are a mixture of romantic longings and progressive beliefs. She admits that this love was never consummated, about which she writes:

Out of millions of your planets,
What did I gain?
Only a single thread of love,
And that also thin and weak.

She relates this love to the situation of the people at large:

Right should be the rider of the horse of time
And hold the reins in such a way,
That the people should reach their destination.

With her next collection *Ashoka Cheti* (the name of a flower) which was published in 1957, a kind of precocity enters Amrita's expressions, as the title of this collection indicates. But some of the poems in it really stand out. For instance, in "Kanya Kumari" (Virgin of the Cape) which is also the Indian name of Cape Comorin, a sensitive beauty marks the idealistic concept of a virgin being:

Turned to stone are the grains of rice
At the plight of the likes of me
The sweet fruit on the stalk of love
None has the luck to taste.

In one of the poems, "Yaksha di Patni" (Wife of Yaksha) alluding to the great Sanskrit poet Kalidas's *Meghdoot* (The Cloud Messenger), she writes:

Neither am I a denizen of Alka Puri,
Nor are there any paintings in my mansion,
Like that of the God Indra's bow.

In her introduction to the next volume of poems, *Kasturi* (Musk) published in 1959, Amrita Pritam discusses the relation between personal love and social consciousness and ends with Stephen Spender's remarks that before starting the process of writing the poet's mind is occupied by a kind of cloud, a mist of thought... This can be called an artiste's personal aspect. I regard this aspect as a necessary and firm foundation for the structure of creation. Amrita Pritam subscribes to the validity and power of this phenomenon and the poems in this volume are more specifically than ever before expressions of personal love, so that she addresses life:

Don't shut your doors, O life
Honour my fortitude in love,
Comes from the deserts of sand,
The sound of footsteps.
Don't shut your doors, O life,
Pray, a little while,
Love holds out its bowl,
Pour into it the alms of life.

Trying to outlive the pathos of unrequited love in *Chetra*, she writes:

The vendor of *Chetra* came
A bundle on his shoulder
I bought a piece of the musk of love
And the world was looking on.
Blessed be this bargain
The world that was laughing at me yesterday
comes today to borrow a pinch of it from me.

SSS

Recipient of Bharatiya Jnanpith Award, Amrita Pritam is a symbol of women's liberation amongst the contemporary Indian writers, she has been a valiant crusader for several causes that she has fought for successfully. Much maligned for her bold narration of some of the events in her life, she has invariably evinced the courage of her convictions and eminently vindicated a writer's inalienable right to speak out his or her heart and mind.

It has been a long and arduous journey that Amrita Pritam has traversed. Starting her career of a poet who talked about her passions in the garb of traditional symbols, her works today are peopled with incestuous fathers and mothers eloping with their sons. A sensitive artisle, she does all this by weaving it in the fabric of social reality. Never for a moment does she offend good taste though she may be treading on orthodox toes. She has come a long way from the old fairy tale magic of her poetry of early days. There is defiance against all that is outworn and obsolete in her writing today.

She has consistently highlighted man's disaffection to woman and has written poetry and prose of ardent passion on this theme.

A poem entitled "Kumari" (The Virgin) in *Kaghiz te Canvas* (Named for the Jnanpith Award) tells the story of a modern girl with all the sophistication of a protagonist of change in the poetess:

When I moved into your bed
I was not alone–there were two of us
A married woman and a virgin
To sleep with you
I had to offer the virgin in me
I did so
This slaughter is permissible in law
Not the indignity of it
And I bore the onslaught of the insult
The next morning
I looked at my blood-stained hands
I washed my hands
The way I tidied the foul-smelling organs
But the moment I stood before the mirror
I found her standing there
The one whom I thought I had slaughtered last night
Oh God!
Was it too dark in your bed
I had to kill one and I killed the other?

Amrita Pritam is equally popular in Pakistan chiefly due to her famous poem "Aj Aakhaan Waris Shah Noon" (I Address Waris Shah Today), lamenting the plight of the Punjab during the holocaust of 1947.

With several honours to her credit including the Sahitya

Akademi Award in 1956 and D. Litt (Honoris causa) from Delhi University in 1973 followed by a number of other universities, Amrita Pritam has certainly carved out a niche for herself amongst the immortals of Punjabi literature.

KSD

Harbhajan Singh (b. 1920)

Dr Harbhajan Singh was born on 18 August, 1920 in Lumding, a small town in Assam where his father was employed in a building firm. Orphaned in early childhood, his mother brought him to a village near Lahore where her brother lived.

He passed his M.A. in Hindi and later took the Ph.D. degree for a study of Hindi poetry in Gurmukhi script, which connected him again with his Punjabi origin. In his early youth he had written the popular kind of religious and political verse in Punjabi for recitation in poetry symposia. Coupled with his academic erudition, success as a popular versifier led him to write verse of a most sophisticated kind. And the socialistic ideas floating in the atmosphere induced him to express feelings of revulsion against the prevailing feudal and capitalist order of post-Independence India, which found expression in poems published in 1960 in a collection entitled *Lasan* (Weals). The very title is expressive of the exploitation suffered by the lower orders in our society. He expresses this feeling in a poem entitled "Kohlu da Bald" (Bullock of an Oil-Mill):

> I keep awake the whole night long,
> Having drawn the whole day the oil-mill
> My limbs are broken with fatigue
> Rightly it should have been the intoxicant of sleep.
> Which should have filled me with a sense of elation
> But it is a fainting feeling which overcomes me.

He presents the worker as a starving victim of capitalist exploitation. He addresses his employer in these terms:

> You have made my body starve
> So that it has become a beam eaten by white ants,
> And my rich soul
> Of which I was proud
> Goes every night to sleep in its contortions.

The worker has got used to exploitation and oppression so much as to say:

> It is not a new bitterness that I experience today
> It is not a new wheel
> The chilblains on my feet are the same
> The same are the callouses on my hands.

About the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the poet laments:

> As if pitch darkness has enveloped
> Distant unknown villages, unseen towns,
> Everywhere it is dark,
> Only a few eyes are filled with sparkling tears.

Harbhajan Singh comes face to face most clearly and boldly with the situation created by the invention and accumulation of nuclear weapons in his long dramatic poem "Tar Tupka" (The Drop on a Wire). In this poem the poet draws the conclusion that the defeat of capitalism which has invented the atom bomb to defend its world-wide exploitation is inevitable. Further, in it he characterises the present-day world as follows:

> Hatred is the highest ethical principle of this age,
> The king is bitterly against thc subject,
> The subject against the king,
> Mothers are annoyed with their children for being
> always hungry
> The children are annoyed because there is no milk
> in the mother's breasts,
> Beauty spits at lust but gets sold to it,
> Lust having tasted of beauty throws it away.

The scientist has passed the frontiers of pain and pleasure and this has debilitated and oppressed him so much as to say:

> When the four times distilled spirit cannot
> Bring peace to the heart,
> When a thousand times distilled spirit
> Cannot extinguish the fire in the heart,
>
> I have still a stronger spirit,
> I can give it to you if you so desire.

There is none, there is none,
There is no distilled thing that can quench my fire.

But in the end he resolves to change the direction of his experiments, to say:

I am coming, my dear, I am coming,
I am still strong enough to train
The wings of doom.
After a long long time shines again the homeward path,
Come, let us sweep this path with our eyes.

Harbhajan Singh may be said to have introduced a new style in Punjabi poetry. He expresses a rebellious mood against the existing order but he refrains from any kind of blatant militancy. In fact, when he protests, his protests assume a feminine aesthetic tone. He poses his aesthèticism as a challenge to the critical and militant mood of the progressives. He challenges what may be called the progressive mood in the following lines:

Whenever I enter into a dialogue with you,
My breath emits the note of a flute
I have heard for the first time from your lips
'My mind can register only a grating voice'
If you have no love at all for the flute,
Or if you cannot trust yourself with the flute
You may ply your sword on the flute and go.

This tune of the flute Harbhajan Singh introduces in Punjabi poetry, perhaps for the first time. Amrita Pritam used sweet words but there was always a sting in them, Harbhajan Singh's sweetness is entirely lyrical in which he says:

I am fragrance-filled wind, beloved, at your door,
Look for once, beloved.
Who has come to your door,
My raw youth wants your company
My pure, untouched limbs, my uncombed hair,
A first time fancy smoulders in my breast and
Red are my garments.

At the second stage he frees himself of romantic fancy and comes face to face with reality. But even so every word of his carries a lyrical potential:

In the fire of life we die and
Live in the same moment
It is a treeless plain in which
There is no hiding place for love.
We have met on a rocky field,
Flat like the palm of a hand,
Naked before each other like rays of the sun.

His instinct to avoid the discordant tone makes him a formalist. From his fondness for the Russian formalist he advances to adopt a structuralist view of poetry. Thus he frees himself from any commitment to a philosophy or ideology and comes to believe only in the potency of the unfamilier, paradoxical and striking expression. From the pursuit of objective reality he diverts himself to enter into a poetic world. In this he is obliged to part with the traditional and the familiar about which he writes:

The tree uprooted and carried like an umbrella
Will dry up after going a few steps.
The blade of a dead tree will not last long,
A tree has to grow from its own earth,
Alone and apart like me.

Harbhajan Singh creates his own poetic reality in dramatic situations. Therefore, many of his poems are either addressed to a friend or an antagonist, or they are a kind of dramatic monologue. In this dramatic monologue the reality is presented on many layers, about which he writes:

I immersed my hand deep in the stream.
From the second layer of water,
I brought out a shadowy shape,
Like the ghost of one who has died in his youth
In my hand came the odour of a life vainly spent
Before I could speak a word,
A crocodile twisted in the waving stream
As if the second layer of water was coiling round him,
In all its nakedness.

The next collection *Na Dhupe Na Chavan* (Neither Sun nor Shade) shows affiliation with the new cult of experimentalism. These poems are more subjective than those in the earlier collection

and as the title indicates, the poet finds himself in a dubious situation. He is so overwhelmed by the corruption of his age as to be obliged to say:

> The door does not open.
> On every door corruption stands guard,
> Through our world which every ray passes,
> And gets extinguished in the passing.

His existentialist despair and fear are so heavy as to make him say:

> Every morning when the newspaper wakes me up,
> I understand only too well that the sun has risen on my home,
> All stars have been swept away and now it is my turn.

The same mood continues in the next collection *Sarak de Safe Ute* (On the Page of the Road). In this collection are included some poems addressed to the famous religious prophets of the world, like Jesus Christ and Guru Nanak:

> The message that Guru Nanak had carried
> on foot long distances,
> Cannot be delivered in any other way.

Addressing Jesus Christ, he says:

> Come, our father,
> Climb down from your heavenly cross,
> And carry this new cross,
> Which my generation has devised for you.

In *Alf Dupahir* (Steep Noon), Harbhajan Singh has written about the violence and destruction perpetrated by the Pakistani army against the people of East Pakistan out of which travail Bangladesh was born. The poet has succeeded so well in conveying the travail and desecration of the Bengali people as if he were indeed one of them.

Harbhajan Singh has passed through a period of romantic experience which, however, is more aesthetical than passionate. His poems in the collection *Adh Raini* (The Midnight Song) and *Main Jo Bit Gaya* (I of the Past) present him as a sensitive aesthete.

SSS

Dr. Harbhajan Singh's poetry is marked for its thought-content with a bearing on the industrialisation and urbanisation of our society. While 'Safeer' tends to be metaphysical, Harbhajan is

secular in his approach and wields his pen with the rare confidence of a skilful craftsman. With Harbhajan and 'Safeer', Punjabi poetry has moved a long way from popular poetry. While 'Safeer' is inscrutable, Harbhajan like Neki appears to be inscrutable. He writes intense but rarefied verse, delicately beautiful. His predominant note is personal and realistic:

Stars and I
Together we go to sleep in the street
Witness to each other's burning limbs
But dare not enter each other's dreams...

My wife sweeps the litter in the house
And throws it into the street
Mortally afraid I hold my breath
Lest she *find* and *sweep* me out too!

Here is a poet with a modern mind arresting the moments of self-confrontation against the background of shadows of his vast learning and scholarship. His poems like "Chan di Grahi" (A Morsel of the Moon), "Hijrat" (Farewell) and "Bloonga" (The Kitten) shimmer with exotic rhythm and folk colour. His use of language is unquestionably vernacular but rather too deliberate to be termed colloquial. There is lyrical artistry in every phrase that he uses.

KSD

Santokh Singh 'Dheer' (b. 1920)

A veteran political activist, Santokh Singh'Dheer' is bold, outspoken, down-to-earth and yet essentially poetic. His is the poetry of struggle. He yearns for change, a fair deal to the downtrodden and the suppressed, the backward and the have-not. At times he appears to be getting impatient and resorts to slogan-mongering. Nothing wrong with it if it is meaningful and lyrical. He is invariably hard-hitting. He has spent many a night in the police lock-up and quite a few winters behind bars in one Punjab jail or another. Inevitably, he shares his experience with his readers. He is full of anger and yet it is no ordinary poetry:

Here Nanak worked the grinding mill
And Krishna saw the light of day
You are too small a man, Dheer
Don't you think the way you do.

("Hawalat")

Again and again there are echoes of revolutionary urges in 'Dheer's' verse. He is not content with what his contemporaries say and how they say it. He is ready to launch a new style and tread untrodden paths. He claims to be the harbinger of a new era:

I shall write new poetry
Not with pen,
But with arrow
And the sword.
And with axe
I shall balance its metre.

("Nawin Kavita")

His attack on anti-social elements is fierce and virulent. He seems to be killing the proverbial two birds with one stone. He is merciless with those who indulge in evils like black-marketing and yet pose to be God-fearing and religious.

His search for truth is that of a socially conscious writer. He highlights the harsh realities of life. He shuns idealism, romanticism and sentimentality. He seeks truth, honesty and accuracy. He asks: "When foreigners visit India, what do we show them?"

Some tourists have come
To see India;
The incidence of your corruption
Is more massive than the Qutb Minar
Speak, India!
They should see Qutb or your corruption?
Speak, my India!

More important among his works are: *Ag de Patte* (Leaves of Fire) *Dharti Mangdi Minh Ve* (The Earth Asks for Rain) and *Poh Phutala* (Day-dawn).

KSD

Prabhjot Kaur (b. 1924)

After the publication of two volumes of juvenalia under the titles, *Azal Ton* (From Primeval Time) and *Lat Lat Jot Jage* (Bright Burns the Flame), Prabhjot Kaur's talent achieves maturity in *Supane Sadhran* (Dreams and Desires) which aptly indicates the mode and matter of her poetry. Being still the work of a youthful talent, it gives

an impression of newness and purity of emotion which has not been touched by despair. If there is a note of sadness here and there, it is born of the impatience of a newly-wedded wife. On closer examination, this impatience does not sound like a personal note, but is found to be the soulful voice of an intellectual of the middle class, who is now and then visited with anxiety that borders on anguish. As a sensitive woman of the middle class, Prabhjot is conscious of something lacking in wedded life in spite of the physical and material pleasures it offers. Not understanding the basic reason for this anxiety, she regards it as the inaccessible infinitude of love which she may now and then call the frailty of the loved person but has not the courage to condemn in conscious terms. She reproaches the loved one as a man of many affairs and broken promises who has beguiled her virgin faith. She calls him an itinerant vendor of hearts, without getting rooted in any single love. This discontent has been the lot of man and woman ever since the beginning of time, but it cannot be accepted as something eternal. In spite of tall claims to be awake, not only like a woman inebriated with the feudal and even capitalist emotional fare but like all of humankind languishing under the opiate of idealism, she is still under the spell of a romantic feeling, as when she says:

> Boatman, launch my boat on the water,
> Do not ask where I intend to go,
> Or what is my destination.
> Do not worry about the descending night,
> The stars are shining like immortal lamps.
> Floating softly and imperceptibly
> We will reach some shore somewhere.

Even in these poems the poet has, however, kept her discontent more or less controlled. But a fuller answer is available in the poems of the next collection *Pankheru* (The Winged Bird). She tries to fall in line with socialist ideas and comes to know that deep at the root of her discontent is the imperialist capitalist social order where economic exploitation of the peasant and worker is compounded by a war psychosis.

This condition of awakening persists in her next collection, *Ban Kapasi* (The Flowers of Cotton) from which level the poet ascends the plateau of consciousness in the collection *Pabbi* (Plateau) from where she casts a backward look at her early youth, when—

The red blood flowing in the veins
Was made fresh by every breath
And the mind would find
Innumerable excuses for living.

After then came a period of wedded life, when—

It seemed that on this earth
There were only you and I
All else was a play-field for us.

And then again in middle age:

The straight-seeming road
Fell headlong into a depression.

In the next stage she feels that love is a saltless lump and has nothing in store for her. In the limitless wilderness the eyes look for the bank of sand, so that only in some kind of dream does the heart feel warmed up in an intoxicating moment in which

The thorny paths are forgotten
The destination seems very near.

In *Akarshan* (Gravitation), the poet has tried to philosophise:

When you press me to your heart
The distinction between good and bad
Is kept in a corner of the unconscious.

In *Pabbi* (Plateau), she feels

There is no sinking feeling
No desire cries
I do not seek excuses for living now,
Life finds me out
On its own.

In the historical context, Prabhjot Kaur belongs to the second generation of progressive poets. Therefore she is not stirred by a keen sense of rebellion. She craves to have a more sophisticated feeling but has not looked for a haven in sheer aestheticism or existentialism.

After *Pabbi* appeared *Khari* (The Gulf) in 1961. The mood of these poems is expressed succinctly in a line on the under cover:

Wide is the ocean of time,
And life a narrow gulf.

In "Nirantar" (Continuance), the mood returns:

The circle of awareness of endless,
Falling in the whirlpool again.

There is a regret for lost time in "Mantav" (Purpose):

There was much time to pull down the sky to one's feet
To build and demolish dreams daily.

Whoever thought of winning and losing thus?

In "Athan" (Evening):

Pain has knocked on the door again

But when I opened the door to speak out:

There was nobody there but my fear.

Vad Darshi (The Concave Lense) appeared in 1973. On the under cover and in the title poem, the poetess claims:

I am looking into the mirror.
Transparent and enlarging,
Reflecting fact and truth.

The mood of the earlier collection persists in *Amal Rup, Saphal Rup* (The Practical is Successful):

Every new youth
Has seen the vision of a new age

But with advancing age
The blood in the vessels goes cold

In the concluding poem, "Bilauri Chahamb" (Crystal Pool), the poet concludes:

In the crystal pool of the intellect,
Nothing is dim, unclear or slow.

SSS

Shiela Gujral (b. 1924)

Shiela Gujral, with as many as seven collections of poems in Hindi

to her credit, came to Punjabi verse with *Amar Vel* (Ever-green Creeper) in 1986. Even in her maiden endeavour, she has proved that she has a pronounced flavour of her own. She is no pale copy of any better-known writers—women or men—of Punjabi poetry. Entering the portals of Punjabi verse via Hindi, very much the way Maheep Singh had come to Punjabi fiction, Shiela Gujral shows a fresh approach. Her idiom, her diction, her choice of subjects and themes are, by and large, her own.

However, what she shares with an important woman writer like Amrita Pritam is a capacity for bold, uninhibited unveiling of the secret recesses of female sensibility. It is only a woman who could write a poem like "Blatkar" (The Rape). But it required the sensitivity of Sheila Gujral to paint a raped virgin in all her agony and in all its subtle nuances. Three gentle strokes of brush and she completes the picture of a woman undone by unwelcome sex. What should have been a golden image on the canvas of life is nothing but stains of soot all over.

On the golden canvas of my mind
He came like a spilling inkpot
And in the twinkling of an eye
Left with innumerable stains all over.

Again, with consummate skill, Shiela Gujral produces pen-portraits of nature. There is hardly a detail that misses her eye. Her pictures throb with life. She invests them with warm emotional content. In her hands the morn is like a playful sweetheart descending on the earth in search of her lover.

At times she paints pictures in sound. With clever use of words she lights up the contours of an image that haunts the reader with its sheer music. In her composition "Shehnai" (The flute), Sheila Gujral follows the notes of the instrument with sustained imagery and suave diction.

Highly educated, widely travelled, richly experienced, the creative writer in Sheila Gujral is deeply conscious of the social responsibility of a writer. She is merciless with the foibles of the middle class, the snobbery of the rich and the unbecoming machinations of politicians. She does not spare her own clan of poets and writers:

I write poetry
I am not bothered about commonplace happenings;

A bride burnt alive,
A landlord shot at,
The Harijan colony set ablaze,
Democracy destabilised;
These are everyday occurrences
We have little to do with them.

Sheila Gujral has called her other collection of Punjabi verse *Niara Hindustan* (The Peculiar India). She combines in her an altogether different milieu—a life-long social commitment and a close insight into the contemporary political scene in the country. She seems to have these as her main source of inspiration. It is in the context of this background that she calls her country *Niara* (Peculiar). Not *Sare Jahan Se Achha*, the best in the world; a country where Roop Kanwar loaded with jewellery, led by drum-beat, is hauled over a burning pyre like a sack of rubbish!

KSD

Mohinder Singh Sarna (b. 1925)

Mohinder Singh Sarna, a retired civil servant, is better known as a short story writer in which capacity he has been honoured by the Language Department of the Government of Punjab. However, of late he has been attracting eminently merited notice as a writer of longer poems called *Mahakavya*. His latest work is entitled *Paonta*. He has two other publications in this genre, *Chamkaur* published in 1977 and *Saka Jin Kiya* published in 1978.

Temperamentally suave and gentle, Sarna's poetic charm conforms to his disposition as a person. Search for purple passages, therefore, is uncalled for. He maintains a dignified candour. He impresses a discriminating reader all the more because for his treatment he has chosen subjects from Sikh history, more especially the period when the Sikh people were engaged in a headlong clash with Mughal tyranny. It is the same steady and subdued note in Sarna's account whether it is the supreme sacrifice of Guru Tegh Bahadur or his son Guru Gobind Singh's clash with the Mughals at Chamkaur where two of his sons laid down their lives fighting against odds or his exploits while stationed at Paonta Saheb where Guru Gobind Singh made cooks and recluses fight against veteran warriors:

When it came to fighting
Sweetmeat vendors and sadhus
acquitted themselves gloriously.

Sarna owes it to his discipline of a historian and his background of a civilian who is trained to hold the scales even. It is remarkable the way he weaves excerpts from *Gurubani* into his narration giving due regard to metre and diction in the original:

"Nede aiya ant hai chhaddi nahin umeed
Aje vi tarla ghatke akhan wang Farid
'Kaga Karang dhandholia sagla khaya mas
Eh do nainan mat chhohiho pir dekhan di aas."

Similarly, where he finds an opportunity to describe nature, the artiste in Sarna displays the creative skill of his pen unmistakably:

It was a peaceful night with a clear sky.
The subtle charm of moonlight was spread all around
The weather was kind and the breeze gentle,
It moved with glamour and sang sweet songs.

It is not easy to curb the fictionist in a writer while writing on a historical subject. Sarna, a short story writer of no mean merit, does so creditably.

KSD

Sohan Singh 'Josh' (b. 1925)

Sohan Singh writes under the pen name of 'Josh'. He is adept in both Punjabi and Urdu. He has already published four collections in Punjabi. They are *Dhup Chhan* (Sunshine and Shade), *Samen di Mang* (Need of the Hour), *Goongi Dharti* (The Mute Earth) and *Balde Bujde Akkar* (Words that Burn and Extinguish).

Born in Ilawalpur, Sohan Singh had his schooling in Jamser village. He could not go beyond primary school and joined a workshop at Jalandhar as an apprentice. He was with this workshop for four long years. In the mean time, his father moved to Africa seeking greener pastures. This forced Sohan Singh to shift to Lahore where he found employment as a semi-skilled worker.

Then came the Partition riots which drove Sohan Singh to Africa to find safe haven with his father. Arriving in Nairobi, he

joined a British firm as a turner. Today he is the owner of a fairly big workshop.

A highly skilled technician, Sohan Singh has not forgotten his motherland. He frequently visits India, and has written a number of songs for films; several of his compositions have been turned into albums by recording companies in Bombay and London.

But it is as a poet that Sohan Singh really impresses. He writes with equal felicity in Punjabi and Urdu. He was elected founder President of the Punjabi Sabha in Nairobi in 1967 and then again in 1971.

What distinguishes his poetry is his diction. He uses simple words and phrases, free from literary flourishes—no unfamiliar idiom, no verbal sophistry and yet delicately sensitive and perceptively engaging:

> Every evening the bride is dressed up
> Every morning finds her dead.
> My jinglers would keep me awake
> When the whole world sleeps.

His collections of poems contain introductions by such literary dignitaries as Dr. Gopal Singh and Dr. Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia.

Dr. Gopal Singh is particularly moved by the freshness of his idiom and spontaneity of expression. He commends the vigorous pace of his verse that carries away the listener or reader. Dr. Gopal Singh ranks him with such veterans as Feroz Din 'Sharaf', Teja Singh 'Sabar', Gurdit Singh 'Kundan', Kartar Singh 'Ballagan', Vidhata Singh 'Teer', Charan Singh 'Shaeed' and Ishar Singh 'Ishar'. He also admires the poetic skill with which he pokes fun at the foibles of society and yet is not cynical. Dr. Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia places him in the front rank of Punjabi poets living abroad.

To my mind it is a case of creative diaspora. It is indeed astonishing how a technical man without any formal education can handle his mother-tongue with such confidence. There is an intense search for identity in his poetry. He tries hard to find his real self, burdened as it is with a multiplicity of nuances. He meets the needs of poetry; he is both lyrical and searching. He sings to the new age.

Sohan Singh is a socially conscious poet. There is in his verse an accent on ideology. What distinguishes him from the other

practitioners of verse in his class is his capacity to weave ideas into the fabric of imagery.

To highlight the evils of society, the poet makes use of satire. But it is as mild and painless as one can make it. There is no bitterness, no heart-burning and yet it does not fail to carry the message home:

> He has polluted the Ganga by bathing in it again and again
> Who can save Sita if Ram were to harm her?

It is also a misconception to think that once abroad, the Punjabis distance themselves from religion. The poet in 'Josh' is devotion incarnate. Says he:

> A bit of my devotion, a little of His favour
> I asked for God from God Himself.

But the realist in the poet has little use for that God who does not come to the rescue of man in his hour of need.

> What use is the man who won't allow another to live?
> What use is God who won't come at the hour of need?

A remarkable feature of Sohan Singh 'Josh's' verse is the way he handles his phrase. He makes use of puns, play on words and yet never sounds commonplace.

KSD

Bhagwant Singh (b. 1926)

Bhagwant Singh has published six collections of poems under the titles As *Niras* (Hope and Despair), *Hanere Sath* (Companions in the Dark), *Asgah Bhatkan* (Unlimited Thirst), *Sul Sirjana* (Manufacture of a Cross), and *Vad Prativad* (Point Counterpoint).

His poetry stems from the inhibited experiences of a frustrated middle class, and the axis which makes him conscious of the hollowness and hypocrisy revolving round it. He does not use the traditional regular metres but his lines consist of ironical phrases and figures which have their own poetic rhythms. His irony and satire have, however, no fixed focus. His view of society is negative lacking any specific direction. This lack of fixed direction perhaps makes him more lethal for our present social mores. He is particularly hard upon man's professions of love, especially in respect of the female sex.

SSS

Surjit Rampuri (1926–90)

Surjit Rampuri, whose real name is Surjit Singh Mangat, was born in 1926 in the village of Rampur, now in district Ludhiana. An MA in English and Punjabi he retired as District Education Officer. He began writing verse from the early age of seventeen but published his first collection, *Geetan Bhari Saver* (Morning Full of Songs) only in 1956. Two other collections followed, *Thari Chanani* (Chilly Moonlight 1959,) and *Ichha da Janam* (Birth of Desire 1968). These poems are largely in the romantic progressive tradition prevailing at the time. But in these poems Surjit is more romantic than progressive-minded. That is, he wants a kind of socialist equality not only between man and man but also between man and woman. In one of his poems in the earlier collection, "Dukh da Moh" (Love of Pain), he writes:

> Frightened from pain
> I had hidden myself in the lap of poetry,
> When life would bring some comfort and pleasure
> I would cling to her tempting bossom
> And go to sleep.
> Ultimately I arrived at the secret
> That fighting against pain is best poetry.

In 1973 came a collection of *ghazals, Supnian de Parchhaven* (Shadows of Dreams). More *ghazals* came in two collections, *Gaundi Hai Tanahai* (Loneliness Sings), 1981 and *Pir di Khushbo* (Fragrance of Pain), 1984. As the titles indicate, these are poems in a genre that is apt to be sentimental as well as delicate, in the tradition of Urdu poetry, except in the hands of masters like Faiz in Urdu and Mohan Singh in Punjabi. Moreover, by this time, the progressive trend had grown weak all round.

Two other collections of poems were published, *Budha Darya* (The Old River), 1978 and *Main Sirf Awaz Han* (I am Only a Voice), 1981. In these poems, Surjit shows greater competence and independence of spirit. He is not attracted by the new sirens of experimentalism and existentialism. And yet the lyrical and romantic strain has matured with a more authentic experience of reality.

Surjit had published a collection of songs also under the title *Dard Kahani Ratan di* (The Painful Story of Nights) in 1977. He writes songs and *ghazals* more frequently of late.

SSS

Surjit is generally hailed as a writer of lyrics and songs, which is the spirit of his *ghazals* also.

Winner of Punjab's State Language Department Award for Poetry, Surjit Rampuri balances material gains against spiritual losses. It is the spiritual loss that engages Rampuri's attention. He is bothered about both the peasant and the poet. They must struggle shoulder to shoulder. It is only then that they can bring about a revolution in the country:

> Oh you wielders of the pen, how long would you
> let the sickle lie idle?
> Oh you wielders of the sickle, how long would you
> let the pen feel hurt?

"Restrictions and barriers are bad", says Surjit, "but it is the dammed waters that produce mighty electric power."

KSD

Gurcharan Rampuri (b. 1929)

A peculiar feature of Punjabi poetry of late is that a substantial volume of it is being produced outside the Punjab, across the seven seas. Sati Kumar in Sweden, Ajaib Kamal in Kenya and Ravinder Ravi in Canada are some of the major new voices in Punjabi poetry today. To this galaxy of names another poet who has eminently qualified himself is that of Gurcharan Rampuri.

Based in Vancouver (Canada), Gurcharan Rampuri hails from Rampur, a village in the erstwhile Patiala State where, as he says, slaves of slaves they had no right of franchise even. A childhood companion of Surjit Rampuri, another talented poet, they grew up in the lap of nature, whiling away their evenings sitting on the banks of Sirhind canal with their feet dipped in its muddy waters, 'talking of girls and poetry'. And what fine poetry they both write today!

Gurcharan has nostalgic memories of his village where they have crops of poetry fed on the alluvial soil of feudal hangover, magic and divination:

> My village produces poetry,
> Fragrance and smiles, love of land, hard labour and sweat,
> Beauty and colour, wheat crops and young damsels,
> Liveliness, moonlight and tears descended from heaven
> Silvery streaks on the banks of the stream,

Fire and warmth and the cold indifference
of misunderstandings,
And no less the superstitious practices.

(Rampur)

It is interesting to find that most of the creative output in Punjabi is the contribution of writers nursed on the rural milieu. More from those hailing from villages that are close to bigger towns. The city-born have their peculiar flavour whether it is Vir Singh or Dhani Ram 'Chatrik', Bawa Balwant or Amrita Pritam. Mohan Singh's village Dhamial was in the neighbourhood of Rawalpindi cantonment as Gurcharan's village Rampur can claim proximity to Patiala, the seat of the former Maharaja of the State. Situated as they are, their perception of discrimination against them seems to be acuter than others'. There came a time when Mohan Singh made common cause with the peasant and the worker and forgetting his romantic strain plunged into the struggle for the have-nots. Gurcharan Rampuri does it consistently in his writing. His sympathies are with the Palestinian guerrillas. Lumumba is his hero. He sees a glorious future for Asia:

The heritage of Buddha is shared by us
It is ever so fresh like mountains.
We have the common light of morn
The like of the night we have suffered.

(The Unity of Asia)

Whatever the politicians may say, the creative writer in the Punjab whether on this side of the border or that, is never going to forgive them for the partition of the Land of the Five Rivers. It gives a wrench to the heart of every sensitive Punjabi whether he is Hindu or Muslim to find the neighbours alienated, arbitrary lines of division drawn with common heritage staring in the face. Gurcharan laments having been torn from his friends by reverting to this theme again and again:

Take away the land
Give me my friends.
I adore Nanak and Ranjha.
I am a devotee of Bulha,
A lover of Sassi and Saheban,
I admire Faiz and Hafeez, Qateel and Jalib,

I enjoy Noor Jehan's melodies
And salute Salim from across the seas.
Give me my Ilam Din, Syed, Talib and Rahi,
Give me back my friends.

(The Embrace)

The Punjabis go abroad, work hard day and night, serve overtime and collect dollars to purchase land back in Doaba or wherever it can be had in the Punjab. They may live abroad for years but their attachment to the land of their birth remains as strong as ever. They may lead sterile lives but memory of the Punjab remains green:

My dear motherland
I have a picture of yours
Engraved on my heart
For ever and ever.
The Flower that I left
Remains in blossom
And the candle left lit
Will continue to burn.
The crowded bazaar, the running roads and the bright sun,
The Taj of marble, the lush green crops and the Red Fort
All are alive as ever.

(The Picture)

And like any expatriate Gurcharan has a sense of alienation gnawing at his heart. He may give his best to the country of his domicile but he does not belong there. The lake and the shadows of trees sleeping on its bosom may be like those witnessed back home, but it is not his own country. He is reminded about this cruel fact again and again. At times someone gives a severe jolt:

I lived for years
Under the alien skies
As if I were living in my own country.
The same food, the same language, the same people, the same old wrangles,
The love and the hunger for friendship
Were the same.
Then all of a sudden
A die-hard whip gave me a lash of contempt.
I was living in my world of make-believe.

And now I am amidst the people
Struggling against racial discriminations.

(The Lash)

Going abroad, living among alien people, working under irksome conditions, Gurcharan continues to be seized of problems back home. He cautions his people again and again against self-styled prophets, corrupt politicians, anti-social elements and more than anything else the unjust fabric of our society:

Drawing close to the castle
Revolutionaries must be cautious,
Who knows when someone turns a traitor?
Who knows when surrounded by tall marble walls
Enjoying their heartless, evanescent beauty
A Chenghiz or a Halaku
Takes birth here
Or a corrupt minister
Tries to amass millions for the moment he spent in jail?

(Warning)

Gurcharan has also written love poetry, though he refuses to be tied down by traditional forms or accepted moulds. The lyrical note in what could be called his free verse is unmistakable. The tenderness of thought and sensitive expression remind one of his childhood companion, Surjit Rampuri:

I have your word
To wait a little
Pause a while
Before touching the heady heights
But how do I tell the spring
Not to come?
And the tide
Not to break its head on the beach?

(The Spring)

The more one reads Punjabi writers domiciled abroad, the more one feels convinced that they are craving for an exclusive niche for them in the contemporary Punjabi writing. Gurcharan Rampuri is going to be no mean voice among them. He has come a long way from *Kankan di Khushbo* (The Fragrance of Wheat), 1953 to *Kanchani* (The Glossy) which is a delightful bouquet of his selected verse.

KSD

Karanjit Singh (b. 1930)

Karanjit Singh, a university teacher, has authored two collections of poems. These are *Rishte* (Relations) and *Phul Vi Angare Vi* (Both Blossoms and Sparks) besides a collection of sketches called *Kalam di Akh* (Pen Portraits) a critique of Mohan Singh's poetry—*Mohan Singh Kavya Adhyan* (A Study of Mohan Singh's Verse), *Punjabi Jiwan* (Life in the Punjab) and *Punjabi Lok Dhara* (Punjab Folklore). He has also translated into Punjabi such eminent Soviet authors as Pushkin, Tolstoy and Dostoevsky.

It is a fact that Dr. Singh is gaining better recognition. Prof. Mohan Singh, the renowned Punjabi poet while writing about Dr. Karanjit Singh remarked, "The essential ingredient of a poem is its thought–content... In order to preserve or project it one requires diction. Reading these poems, I am assured that Karanjit Singh has both."

Karanjit Singh has been in the Soviet Union for several years engaged mainly in translating Soviet writing into Punjabi. Therefore, what he writes about the USSR is no formal tribute to a friendly country, it is genuine, soulful verse inspired by understanding and deep appreciation of the socialist way of life. In a longer poem entitled "Awan Ruttan Jawan Ruttan" (Seasons Come and Go) in the section "Nighi Baraf de Chehre" (Face of the Warm Snow) running into over 500 lines, the poet describes the four seasons in Moscow throwing vivid sidelights on the people of the Soviet Union, their loves and longings. Writing about the legendary Kremlin he says:

> The red stars sparkle
> On the pinnacles of Kremlin at night
> Those who sleep in their shadow
> Their eternal sleep,
> Were the purveyors of fragrance
> They spread happiness all over.
> He who rules over everyone's heart
> Whom I, too, adore,
> They stand in biting cold
> To have a glimpse of him.
>
> (Face of the Warm Snow)

What is more remarkable in these poems is the undisguised

influence of Soviet thinking and their manner of stating the truth of life:

It is true
That man doesn't live by bread alone;
It is a greater truth
That man can never live without bread.

Where is truth?
Come, I'II show you
Its abode
Seeing which
It quenches one's thirst.
Come I'll show you my beloved
Seeing whom
The mind is at rest.
Yes, on one condition
That you pull your eyes from your back
And put them on your face.

(It is True)

There are some fascinating specimens of poetry in this volume. What one admires in Karanjit is his not depending entirely on rhyme and metre for the essential music in his verse but on the selection and the arrangement of his words and phrases. He seems to jingle them in his palm and then throws them on the page with the immaculate flourish of a master, making his verse glow with colour and resound with musicality.

KSD

Surjit Sarna (b. 1930)

Surjit Sarna started as a short-story writer. She produced a collection of short stories entitled *Tainki Dard na Aiya?* (Did it not Hurt You?). She, then, moved on to poetry, maybe because she felt that her sensibility was essentially that of a poetess—suave and soft-spoken, tender and warm-hearted, gentle and affectionate, dreamy and debonair. Or maybe she left the short story for her husband Mohinder Sarna to excel in it. And he has lived up to her expectations.

It was a happy decision Surjit opting for poetry, since, as it happened, spouse of a senior civilian, she lived a cloistered life with plenty of time to absorb impressions and a lot of leisure to

ponder over them in tranquillity. Combined with it the company of an intellectual husband, an admirer in waiting, she lived an emotionally rich life.

Like a typical unsophisticated Punjabi maiden, Surjit sings of her love in a full-throated melody. An uninhibited expression of longings. Dreams unshared. A hunger for fulfilment:

It is the promised night
I must not sleep;
It is the night of love
I must not sleep;
The dreamy haze has long been there,
So is the dust of the road.
The candles are dying out
And the eyes are weary;
Let the birds sleep
I will not;
It is the promised night
I must not sleep.

The day never ended
Nor did the night come to an end
When your memory started haunting me.

No more would I light candles,
Let the darkness prevail.
I light them,
And they get extinguished.

How to contain the fragrance?
How do I hold the breath?
People talk in the street about my love.

At times her sensitive pen of a poet arrests soulful moments of people in love:

The air is still,
The sky is vast,
The sun is setting,
The moon rises,
In the ocean of the heaven
The stars appear,
And then disappear.

It's quiet all around
Neither dark nor light.
At this moment of time
Who stands there holding her breath?

As she was warbling these enchanting melodies, the land of her birth was plunged in the turmoil of extremist activity. Surjit cautions her people with a deep agony in her voice:

No more are there Ranjhas in the dales,
Nor are their flutes heard any longer.
We hear the shots of guns and rifles.
Be on your guard, people of my Punjab
We are passing through an hour of trial.

This delightful verse is contained in Surjit Sarna's maiden collection of poetry called *Gal Mere Ishq Di* (Talk of My Love).

KSD

Shiv Kumar Batalvi (1936–1973)

Born in a village in the Shakargarh tehsil of the district of Sialkot (now in Pakistan), Shiv Kumar Batalvi was brought up in Batala where his father was an official (Kanungo) in the revenue department. After passing the matriculation examination, he joined the Baring Union Christian College at Batala and then Khalsa College, Kadian. But he left the second college also after about a year and joined a school at Baijnath in Kangra district for a preliminary course of engineering. There he fell in love with a girl Meena. Meena died of typhoid fever and like Mohan Singh, Shiv Kumar became a victim of unending bereavement. But whereas Mohan Singh was able to outgrow his sorrow, Shiv Kumar kept it alive in his breast until his death.

At his father's insistence he passed a course of land and revenue accounts and actually joined service as a Patwari. Shiv Kumar seems to have acquired an intimate knowledge of the rural scene in a rather isolated corner of Punjab, through his brief experience as a Patwari but it is his Brahmanical culture that links his poetry to the urban Hindu ritual and its picturesque catholicity.

His first collection of poems was published in 1960 under the title *Piran da Paraga* (The Scarf of Sorrows). Shiv Kumar's repeated disappointment in love is poignantly reflected in these poems.

The tone is one of bereavement and despair. The most relished poem in the collection is "Kandiali Thohar" (Thorny Cactus); Shiv Kumar compares himself to this plant which grows in the wilderness and on which no human care is bestowed. In this collection as in all his subsequent work, Shiv Kumar takes sorrow to its last limit.

The next collection of poems followed in 1961 with the title *Lajwanti* (Touch Me Not). In these poems the poet starts from his own experience to an objective realisation of the human situation. It has been called a pleasant combination of tradition and experimentation. In this collection, "Garbhavati" (A Pregnant Woman) is one of Shiv Kumar's great poems.

The next collection came in 1962 with the title *Atte Dian Chirian* (The Sparrows of Flour). In these poems, the poet's vision pierces the colourful curtain of romance to the stark reality of life and gives an indication of his deeper acquaintance with human grief and sorrow.

Menu Vida Karo (Bid Me Farewell) came in 1963. In these poems the poet's lyrical power is at its height and equally pronounced are his intimations of death. It is in this collection that these immortal lines occur:

> I am going to die in the season of youth,
> I am going to depart without emptying my contents,
> After completing a cycle of separation from you.

In 1965 was published Shiv Kumar's masterpiece, a dramatic poem, "Luna". In this poem Shiv Kumar has taken up the legend of Puran Bhakta which has been called an expression of a significant aspect of the Punjabi psyche. It is the story of Puran, son of Raja Salvahan, resisting the solicitations of his youthful step-mother Luna, who perverts the truth into a big lie and accuses the innocent Puran of having attempted to outrage her modesty. Shiv Kumar changes the legend to an extent, by justifying the youthful Luna's solicitation of her step-son, because she has been married against her will to the old Raja Salvahan. So beautifully has Shiv Kumar advocated Luna's case that beside the iniquity of an unequal marriage, Puran's dutiful rejection of Luna's advances appears as a cruel, ascetical insensibility. The poet has woven the tapestry of Puran's rejection in such a way, that it remains inexplicit till the end, whether the rejection is being presented as a compulsion of Puran's role as an ascetic, or as a rejection of beauty and youth by a cruelly motivated social order.

Main Te Main (I and I) published in 1970 is a long poem of seventy-five pages, which is unique in modern Punjabi poetry in both its conception and execution. In the introduction the poet himself writes, "The legend in this poem is not mine, nor is its truth my truth...whatever is mine in the truth of this legend is the truth of my being not of my person. Its psychological background is only a phenomenon of the intellectual and moral scepticism of the present generation. The truth of the hero of this poem is a protest against the false and hollow moral values of today. It is the revolt of modern man's disintegrated personality against the death of his true being." The narrator describes his birth as the result of his mother's sexual hunger even when she is an unmarried woman. This hunger is, according to the poet, sunk deep in the being of every woman, who is basically an unmarried mother. What the poet actually means by this formulation is not quite clear, except on the understanding of the poet's own experience of the basic unmorality of woman's desire for man as her ravisher and her son as the culmination of her innermost sexual urge.

Another collection of poems was published in 1971 under the title *Arti* (Prayer). The poems included in it were written between the years 1963 and 1965. Thus they are chronologically later than both *Luna* and *Main Te Main.*

Alvida (Farewell) was published posthumously in 1974 by the Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar. It contains poems not published before, and these voice more progressive and revolutionary sentiments than Shiv Kumar's earlier poems.

SSS

Shiv Kumar's poetry is marked be the 'death-wish'.

No one may sing this song of mine
I alone will sing it.
I'll sing my song
And take my leave tomorrow
No one may sing this song of mine
I alone will sing it.

Shiv Batalvi recited this poem in a *Kavidarbar* in 1963: The entire audience was spell-bound. A slim, tender, handsome youth, still in his twenties was enchanting the audience with the agony of his melody, a lock of his hair playing on his forehead that he tried to push back with his smoke-stained fingers. He closed his poem with these lines:

When I and my song
Are no more tomorrow,
The love-lorn will come
Looking for us in the graveyard.
And all of them
With one voice would say,
"Very few are destined
To die like this."

There was hardly an eye that had remained dry in the audience.

It seems Shiv not only cherished the death-wish, he found fulfilment in it. It was no sentimentality, he longed for it from the heart of his hearts and he wanted to die young, in the prime of his youth.

I must die at the peak of my youth.
I must return in full bloom.
Having suffered pangs of from you separation
I must die at the peak of my youth.
He who dies at the peak of his youth
Is turned into either a flower or a star.
It's only lovers who die young
Or those who are born lucky.

The more he sang about it, the more the idea gripped him. His life was full of deep wounds. His mother died, his father died, he fell in love with Meena; she was also snatched away by the cruel hand of death. He met another girl who looked like Meena. She jilted him and went abroad. A mere Patwari, he resigned his petty job in disgust. A sensitive youth who could not study beyond matriculation, he threw himself at the mercy of the cruel world; buffeted by circumstances, his soul was bruised. Is it not a lacerated heart that sings thus?

My mother died when I was a suckling
My father when I was a baby.
My sweetheart died when I was young
My song died unsung.
I beg of you, my Lord,
Don't hold me up any more.
Let me go.
Give me a warm tear

And bless me with pangs of separation
Let me go.

Then came a stage when he rejected himself. Such a mood in a perceptive youth, with dreamy eyes and love-songs on his lips, can be disastrous. And a disaster it was. Shiv started chain-smoking, drinking heavily and trying all sorts of odd drugs. He plunged himself headlong into the misery of disillusionment. His contemporaries, not even half as talented, were flourishing and he was left on the streets to live in the backwaters of Batala. His starving young wife and under-nourished children added to his agony. Shiv felt he had already outlived his days:

My love!
What for should I live?
The soiled flesh of my face
Who will kiss or adore ?
My love!
What for should I live?

Shiv Kumar's *Luna* remains his masterpiece and deserves a little more elaborate notice.

The poet has identified himself with Luna. In *Luna* he portrays the tragedy of the helplessness of the Indian woman who has remained at the mercy of her menfolk; maybe he is a father or a husband or a son. No more would she be the helpless witness of injustice inflicted on her. She is determined to revolt. If Salwan the king, who is as old as Luna's father, can marry her, a teenager, why on earth cannot she fall in love with Puran who is of her own age? What if he is her step-son ? Says Luna:

When a father shares his daughter's youth
And no one is outraged
Why should the people's tongue
Wag at her
When Luna falls in love with Puran?

Luna is no more the quiet, submissive, self-effacing Hindu woman. She resists her marriage to a man many times her age against her wishes. She rejects his high caste, his wealth, his status and his palaces. She would rather be happy with a young man of her own age, no matter if he is not well-to-do:

I am an untouchable
Give me an untouchable husband.
Take away these flowers
And give me a handful of thorns.
Snatch away the mansions
And give me a humble hut.
I am the brick of a wall
Restore me to my place.

But it was the man's world in which Luna saw the light of day. No protest avails her. No arguments. No reasoning. Her friend counsels her:

Some fit
And some do not fit
We are the footwear of the menfolk.

And she is married against her wishes to a man who has a son as old as Luna. "I am only a kiss older than him" says Luna. She cannot persuade herself to be his mother. Moreover, his mother was still living, a gentle, pious lady who had been callously passed over. Luna refused to take her place. She would rather have Puran as her lover than as her son. But it is no easy decision. It is a revolt against her times. It is, perhaps, a revolt against nature. It is, indeed, a difficult decision. Luna is miserable. She suffers the pangs of conscience:

Every hour
The serpent of fiery moments
Dances in the inner cells of my soul
And the demon of fear haunts me.
I sit and spin the wheel of time,
I spin the rays of the sun,
And wind them into a rope
And I hang this rope
From the roof of my years
And every day I die
With this multi-coloured noose around my neck
And yet I die not.

It was certainly no easy decision for Luna to take, falling in love with one whom society gave her as her son. But she took this decision. It was frightfully bold of her. She had to go through fire.

How she suffered! At one stage, it appears, it was no more an emotional involvement, it was a cold, calculated decision, a premeditated strategy, as it were:

> I have smeared his piety
> With ugly charges,
> These charges, in due course,
> Will blossom into flowers
> Which will bloom for years and years.
> On this earth
> When people will assemble anywhere
> When people will sit anywhere
> They will talk about Puran
> The unblemished one.

And it seems there is a lot of truth in it. Luna is not deceiving herself. She might have failed in seducing Puran, but she eventually, succeeded in winning him over to her point of view. He starts sympathising with her. In this lies Luna's victory. Puran is prepared to die, so that no Luna is ever exploited. It appears to be a sort of vicarious suffering:

> Slice away my limbs
> So that no Salwahan, in future,
> No father, in future
> May share the youth of his daughter.
> So that everyone
> Marries in his own age-group,
> So that never again a Luna
> Longs for a man other than her husband,
> And never again the youth of a Luna
> Is wasted away.

Puran goes a step further. He condones Luna completely. He rationalises her actions and viewing the entire tragedy from a higher level confirms:

> There is no sinner here
> Nor is there any saint;
> It is the helplessness of circumstances
> This helplessness is named sin.

It is exactly at this spiritual level where Luna also finds herself in the end:

From today, for Luna
There is no good, no evil
Nor day nor night.
Every right is perhaps wrong
Every wrong is perhaps right.

It is at this stage that Shiv passed away.

KSD

11

The New Poetry

Towards New Poetry

The fear that with Mohan Singh and Amrita Pritam we had come to a dead end of Punjabi poetry in our time was belied in the fifties by Harbhajan Singh and Shiv Kumar. They combined in themselves the best of their distinguished predecessors and yet seemed to break new ground. The thought-content in Harbhajan Singh and the lyricism in Shiv Kumar have been claimed to be an improvement upon what they came to inherit. Be that as it may, they, both of them, have a remarkable social awareness.

Following them there was a disquieting pause again. Mercifully it was short-lived. As if to keep pace with the approaching green revolution, there was heard a babbling of voices in the realm of poetry. No sooner had a little over a decade passed than some of these seem to have emerged as distinct notes in a symphonic composition reflecting the agony and ecstasy of our time.

The new generation has many faces looking towards many directions. What they have in common is a search for identity and a quest for self-realisation besides a common myth kitty and verbal luxuriance. Some of them have incoherence of style and incoherence of moral content. Others have a tendency to shift the poet's responsibility to half-articulated protests; a bad poem is blamed on bad society. They are both traditional and experimental, cynical and pragmatic, other-worldly and in love with this world: They ache to rebel and tend to conform. They look back to the past and peer into the future. They strive for form and revel in formlessness. They have their distinctive paths to follow and yet they seem to be moving towards the same goal. They seek social justice and also have an eye on spiritual liberation. They are utterly

intimate and highly sophisticated in the choice of their idiom and phrase.

Their awareness that they belong to a society in flux seems to determine their approach to life. They are not so much bothered about poverty as equitable distribution of opportunities. The heart-aches of the new man and the spiritual needs of the well-fed are some of the problems they seem to be preoccupied with. Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia may find a solution in his concept of the Khalsa, "Hasrat" in what he styles as *Shaktivad*, Jagtar in Iqbal's ego, Misha in Marx, Neki in a more abstract more pervasive spiritual force, Ravinder Ravi in rationalism, Sati Kumar in internationalism and Ajaib Kamal in his own little god in the spirit of enquiry.

They belong to the middle class, all of them, and cannot escape its sensibility. Graduates from Indian universities with English as their medium, they bring to bear a uniform culture on their concepts and craft. They are conscious artistes each one of them. They are well on their way to a confident future though all of them have not yet attained the spontaneity and effortlessness of Harbhajan Singh and Shiv Kumar. (See Appendix II—Problems of the New Writers in Punjabi).

Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia is, perhaps, the most vocal among them. The total output of his writing about the new poetry is certainly more than the new poetry that he has published in the two collections of poems entitled *Kaghaz da Ravan* and *Kood Raja Kood Parja*. Ahluwalia is endeavouring to evolve a new form in poetry that can do adequate justice to the new experience of the industrial society that we are heading towards. He seems to be looking before and after. His imagery is distinctly fresh. He delves in the epics and plants familiar symbols in the modern context. His writing is replete with vocabulary from the *Holy Granth*; and what fascinating use he makes of it! Ahluwalia spearheaded a revolt against the smugness of the traditional poetry in Punjabi. What marks his writing is the seriousness of purpose. Here is a piece typical of his art:

> Living within the limits of the "Lakshman line"
> The Ravana that you are waiting for
> Is a paper-Ravana
> He may not turn up at all.
> Living within the limits of the "Lakshman line"

The Rama that you are waiting for
Has gone back to Ayodhya,
He may not turn up at all.
Walk out of the "Lakshman line"
Come out of nothingness
Into this moment of truth.

("1 × 0 = 0")

Sukhpalvir Singh 'Hasrat' (b. 1936) carries with him the label of *Shaktivad*. Whatever it means, appears to me to be an afterthought. 'Hasrat' is a vital force amongst the new voices of Punjabi poetry. *Hasrat Kavya* a collection of his verse written in the two decades from 1955 to 1975 is a major work of new writing in Punjabi. 'Hasrat' is also identified with the cult of *Prayogvad*. I do not think a poet of his potentialities needs any such props. He carries forward the glorious tradition of the neo-romantics. I find in him Mohan Singh and Pritam Singh 'Safeer' reflected at their best. 'Hasrat' is a typical case of the new writer's impatient search for identity. It seems he has yet to identify himself. It is a pleasure to find 'Hasrat' writing his poetry seriously and then selling it more seriously. What impresses me most is his gentle satire on life around him:

Miss Taneja is compassion incarnate
She loves animals
As much as men
She feeds her dog
With cake indulgently
And makes him sleep in her bed.
When she sees a child in tattered clothes
She comes out of her car
And doles out a coin to him
With tears in her eyes
And feels happy about it.
Then arm in his arm
With a sob on her lips
She exclaims to her boy-friend
"What a poor little thing!"

(Miss Taneja Compassion Incarnate)

In Jagtar we seem to have come a long way in the new tradition of Punjabi poetry. Author of as many as five collections of verse, in

Chhangya Rukh (The Trimmed Tree) all his love poems have been relegated to the last few pages of the collection. It is not without significance. More because this is no minor verse. Some of it is in keeping with the best tradition of Urdu poetry being written today; sharp and chiselled and pregnant with meaning. This takes us closer to the writing across the border in West Punjab with which Jagtar, no doubt, has intimate contacts. The extract from one of his *ghazals* has the flavour of an *ustad:*

For you I clanged my chains
But you failed to notice my steps
It is I who will untangle your locks
And none else but me.

(*Ghazal*)

In arts only those practitioners have the right to indulge in experiment who have acquitted themselves in the traditional forms. Jagtar seems to be highly confident while treading the new paths. His foot is surer. His vision is clearer. His grip is firmer.

The winter is over
And looking at my much repaired
Torn and soiled coat
I ask myself
When I take off this buttoned-up coat
What will be left of me?

(The False Faces)

S.S. Misha has deeper intellectual content in his work. He talks about those who endeavour "to collect glow-worms in a pitch dark night" or "the shadows that walk up to you and wish to be clothed". Sectarianism, parochialism, narrow-mindedness in day-to-day life of the Indian bourgeoisie are some of the themes that recur in Misha's writing. His satire is biting; more painful is the sting in the tail. Like many of his contemporaries the Indo-Pak love-hate complex continues to intrigue him:

Strange is the story of this enmity
If I were to tell a stranger, he wouldn't believe it.
When your armies
Surrendered arms to our armies,
It was a sad day for you
And something to feel sorry about;

You must have shed tears
It was, indeed, so natural
But why did tears gush out from my eyes?

(The Story of Enmity)

Reading his fourth collection of poems *Kach de Vastar,* in the section devoted to the *ghazal,* I discovered that for a poet to succeed as a *ghazal*-writer he must acquire a peculiar idiom. The sort of language and imagery we have evolved for poetry in our part of the Punjab may not succeed. Misha has done better in those *ghazals* where he opts for the vocabulary and imagery generally associated with this genre.

What a loneliness
Not even the shadow accompanies me!
I sing songs of the garden
But not a branch belongs to me.

(Ghazal)

Dr. Attar Singh has called Jaswant Singh "Neki", the author of *Smriti de Kiran ton Pehlan* (Before Shedding Memory) an oft-introduced but less talked about poet. It was indeed a revelation Attar Singh acquainting readers with his verse. He has five other collections of poems including *Asle de Ohle* (Behind the Reality) and *Eh Mere Sanse Eh Mere Geet* (These My Doubts and these My Songs). Neki is a new voice but no minor voice. He is a major poet and like Harbhajan Singh he has invested Punjabi poetry with new content, added new dimensions, and, at times, given it epic heights. He is soaked in myth and magic, a prominent feature of the new poetry. His language is highly charged, it has suggestive ambiguity and direct tonal quality. It is a language devised to communicate those experiences or ideas which defy the deliberate order and pace of prose. Reading his verse libre, not for a moment during the 1010 lines of his longer poem, does the reader miss the traditional props like metre and rhyme. A fascinating imagery, fresh and variegated and highly expressive; the delicacy of his thoughts and the sensitive beauty of his language make his verse flit on one's lips. *Smriti de Kiran ton Pehlan* has ingredients of an epic. But for its size, it should rank with *Nankayan* of Mohan Singh and *Luna* of Shiv Kumar that are less compact, less intense and less subtle in their approach to their respective themes. Neki is a conscious poet. His search for truth does not end in itself, he endeavours to relate it to life.

It is said that Dr. Neki met with a frightful car accident a few years ago and broke his bones more than could be counted. The poem describes the unique experience of the split second when he was "a guest both of life and death". And what a graphic picture he paints:

> Beyond the magic blue of the sky
> There is an endless circle of golden paths
> On which there is
> A spot of nothingness
> Yama is the master of this spot
> Walking the endless track round and round
> The feet touch this spot time and again
> Every path must cross this spot
> When memories start shedding.
>
> (Before Shedding Memory)

It is an entirely new experience reading this poetry.

Ravinder Ravi, Sati Kumar and Ajaib Kamal originally from the Punjab live abroad; Ravinder Ravi is in Canada, Sati Kumar in Sweden and Ajaib Kamal in Kenya. And yet they write regularly in Punjabi, their mother-tongue. Maybe more regularly than many of those who live in the Punjab.

Their contribution is distinctive. They bring new experience and widen the parameters of the new poetry. A lot of experimentation in Punjabi poetry that has acquired the formidable dimensions of a cult can, perhaps, be traced to them. What they see being tried abroad, like fond children, they attempt in their own language. They represent three massive continents and reflect in their writing the winds of change sweeping over them. It goes to the credit of the genius of the Punjabi language that it lends itself to the queerest contents and most mod patterns of form. Reading them one does not feel alien in the company of Dadaists, Existentialists, and the like; even those who practise concrete poetry.

To me, it appears, what the new writer lacks is the struggle in his life. Mercifully war has almost been banished. Colonialism has been disintegrating. The concern for social justice, the only vital plank left, keeps on tantalising the new writer with the varieties of present-day economic orders.

The poet strips away inessentials and reveals only what is

important. He discovers order amidst chaos, meaning in the middle of confusion and affirmation in the heart of despair. The new writer, at times, seems to be adding to the confusion with his cynicism and impatience. But, then, one must sympathise with him. He feels rootless, and rightly so, disorientated, depersonalised, and isolated. The loneliness of the trio—Ravi, Sati and Kamal—is all the more poignant because of the absence of a sense of belonging in the countries of their domicile and lack of adequate understanding of their talent back home, what one of them describes as "conspiracy of silence."

Ravinder Ravi is a prolific writer. Besides poetry he writes plays, short stories and occasional literary criticism. *Shehr Jangli Hai* is his sixth collection of poems. He asks many questions. And tries to answer them in his naive way. He is not interested in "the heaven of tomorrow", he would much rather have "the naked moment of today". He has no use for the system in which "the crops of hunger grow in the fields" and "every child born has a question-mark on his face". He finds wilderness creeping into the cities. He feels let down, lonely and alienated. Man has been mechanised, snapping his relations, human and social. His need for sex is enormous:

> I am engulfing that girl
> Like the ocean surrounding the earth.
> That girl
> Who is the fire of the African jungle,
> She is jumping out of her frontless blouse.
> Many a crocodile is born in me,
> Hungry with their jaws agape
> They are swallowing girl after girl after girl.
>
> (Resplendent Dream)

There is no more honey-sweet mellifluousness of the neo-romantics, no more dainty descriptions of the sweetheart and her heart-warming blandishments. There is utter wilderness in the heart of the new man, deep and dark. With his wife equipped with the loop and the prospect of artificial insemination, he is left utterly dismayed:

> And there is another jungle
> Dark and deep
> The jungle of suspecting his wife
> Wearing the loop.

And entertaining untold fears
With artificial insemination
Tried in the veterinary hospitals.

(Jungle and Jungle)

Sati Kumar claims a large number of readers in the West and bemoans their absence in the country of his origin. He is a member of the Writers' Union of Sweden which is a rare honour. He was in the vortex of many a literary controversy before shifting to Sweden. Back in India some time ago, among other things he published his latest collection of poems entitled *Rahao*. It is a dainty volume with a fistful of poems spread over sixty odd pages. Though Sati Kumar is in the vanguard of trend-setters in the new Punjabi writing, there is a tendency in his recent poems to create effect with turn of a phrase and such other literary devices. One is not able to explain it. Unlike his earlier work *Ghodian di Udeek* (Waiting for the Horses) his new collection is rather thin and gives an impression of the poet's anxiety to figure in print without adequate preparation. Those who decry his so-called gimmicks have something like this in view:

On the new planet
It was the only tree
And that too forbidden.
No one may climb it
It was ordained
Before you climb up
You must climb down the tree.

Ajaib Kamal is typical of his tribe, aggressive and overbearing, much too preoccupied with modernity. A lot of what he writes is foreign to the sensibility of an average Punjabi reader. One is not quite sure if it is all right for a creative artiste to ignore his readers. A total disassociation with the reality of form and idiom can be bewildering for the audience. But then Kamal claims to give new meaning to words. With his own genre he intersperses the forms of audio-visual media. He is aware that gimmicks, humbug, exhibitionism do not make great poetry. It needs *sadhana*, yoga and involvement. Here is a modernist who is bitterly critical of modernism:

With a typewriter on the head, electronic brain,
Teleprinter and computer

An intrasonic time-piece ticking in his heart
A zoom camera on the eyes
A mike on the mouth
Missiles and multiple bombs on the chest
Legs on the wheels
Flying wings of jet planes on the shoulders
Propelled by coal, petrol and atomic energy
How much civilized
And clever the new man is!

(Chanakyas are Dead)

Ajaib Kamal is an inveterate experimentalist. He seems to have walked a long way ahead of even his contemporary new writers. He should carry others along with him or go slow until they pick up his pace. His grievance that he has not been given due recognition by his people is justified. But the reason appears to be that more often than not Ajaib Kamal is shooting above their heads.

Kamal's *Vartman Turya Hai* (The Present Moves) is a triology with three constituents—"Khala Vich Latke Manukh" (Men Hanging in Space), "Vartman Turya Hai" (The Present Moves) and "Chanakya Anhe Han" (Chanakyas are Blind). While a good many new writers talk about experimentation, here is a poet who practises it uninhibitedly, not at all concerned with the consequence.

KSD

Jaswant Singh Neki (b. 1927)

When Dr. Neki's first collection of poems entitled *Asle to Ohle* (Behind the Reality) appeared, the late Prof. Teja Singh, the grand old man of Punjabi letters, remarked: "Punjabi poetry has now come of age." Teja Singh was certainly not wrong.

But then Dr. Neki assumed prolonged silence. A time came when some of his readers felt that it was, perhaps, a freak blossom. They had almost started forgetting the new melody when in 1974 on the highway from Delhi to Chandigarh an incident occurred that bids to go into the history of Punjabi verse.

Most significant in this happenstance was the split second when after the crash the poet was "guest of both life and death." This split second has given birth to some refreshingly enchanting verse in Punjabi.

In his long poem entitled "Smriti de Kiran ton Pehlan" (Before

Shedding Memory) published in 1976, Dr. Neki talks about what happened to him before he lost his memory. He depicts the topography of the cosmic spot where man loses his identity and merges into the Eternal. It is beyond the blue skies. It is an endless, resplendent path that goes round and round. Every traveller must cut this path and the moment he does so, memory withers away.

The accident on G.T. Road was like the fire that burns out all the accidental in man and leaves one bare and real, his own and truthful self. It set the poet free from shadows. It gave him a new conception of life, an awareness of the mysterious significance of existence.

With Dr. Neki Punjabi poetry has moved away from the death-wish that was reflected in Mohan Singh and which became the main cry of Shiv Batalvi. It is no more the traditional long wait of the sweet-heart and the eventual realisation of the futility of it all. Dr. Neki is soaked in myth and magic, and yet in his search for truth, he does not lose his grip on reality.

Here is an extraordinarily complex poet who writes simply. He holds together the strands of intricate elusive thought with the help of the delicacy of image and the beauty of phrase:

> Then on the downward path of life
> Trampling the leaves we have shed
> We walk away.
>
> The sense of inquiry is aware
> That every secret is anxious
> To get revealed.

Dr. Neki continues his unique experience in his later work *Karuna di Chhoh ton Magron* (After the Touch of Compassion). It is another long poem in which he seems to be concretising the images, and takes the reader a little more into confidence and gives him another peep into the world through which he has travelled.

It is an intense, rarefied experience, delicately beautiful, full of mystery and occult grandeur. There are long imaginary dialogues with imaginary individuals whom the poet not only hears but sees and names. It is an open-ended dramatic monologue.

None among the new writers in Punjabi has tried more consistently to find his real self with its multiplicity intact. Early in this century Bhai Vir Singh had attempted it in *Rana Surat Singh*.

The devoted princess in search of her deceased prince reaches a spiritual stage where she outlives the need for living with the prince. The *abhisarika* in *Karuna di Chhoh ton Magron* goes a step further. The Savitri in her has the destiny of her Satyavan altered.

Dr. Jaswant Singh Neki belongs to the tribe of Pritam Singh 'Safeer'. 'Safeer' is inscrutable, Neki appears to be inscrutable. He meets the present need of poetry which is both lyrical and searching, a poet who sings of the new age.

Author of more than six poetical works—*Asle de Ohle* (Beyond the Reality), *Eh Mere Sanse Eh Mere Geet* (My Fears and My Songs), *Smriti di Kiran ton Pehlan* (Before Shedding Memory), *Karuna di Chhoh ton Magron* (After the Touch of Compassion), *Pratibimb de Sarovar Ton* (From the Pool of Reflections), *Na Eh Geet Na Birhade* (It's Neither a Song Nor a Dirge) and *Birkhe Heth Sab Jant* (All Those under the Tree), Dr. Neki is, indeed, a major poet of the language.

KSD

Tara Singh (b. 1929)

Tara Singh is comparatively unaffected by both the progressive and the experimental creeds. When his first collection *Simmade Pather* (Oozing Stones) was published in 1956, the era of progressive poetry was nearing its end. The romantic creed too had been left behind. Therefore he had a voice of his own. Unlike the progressive poets, he did not want to merge or expand his personal sorrow into the misery of the people. He kept the two apart as parallel streams. He writes:

> There is the grief over one's friend.
> Which makes the heart dissolve moment by moment.
> And then there is the grief of labour
> Which is not valued by the market.

Similarly, he tells his beloved:

> The business of the world is going on, too,
> Along with the preoccupation of your love.

Conscious of his non-alignment, even proud of it, he writes:

> Why should I become a Picasso?
> My paintings will not bear a brush used by another,
> New paintings look for a new brush and a new canvas.

He uses the extended metaphor in preference to the unitary metaphor of most poetry, traditional or progressive. For instance, about his sentiment of love, he writes:

Every moment from every lair of the mind,
Flows the tale of my love,
As in some places in the mountains,
From moist, damp stones,
Oozes slowly, lukewarm, soft warm water.

His next collection *Meghale* (Clouds) 1958 continues the same mood, perhaps with greater refinement. Tara Singh can keep proper balance between feeling and intellect, though sometimes he becomes rather cynical, as when he says:

Whenever you and I meet,
We are afraid of each other
For we know we are going to ask about each other's welfare.

And sometimes perhaps a kind of sentimentality creeps in, all the same as when he says:

O, my intimate life-mate,
Allow me, in your simplicity,
To kiss the feet of my child,
For there is yet no particle of dirt in its nails.
Allow me, O my intimate,
That the touch of my lips
May enjoy the taste of your womb.

There is perhaps a fall-back in his third collection, *Asin Tusin* (We and You) although here also he knows and accepts the dividing line between his generation and the next, as when he says:

O people, who will come after us,
Accept our congratulations,
For a conscious vision of a beautiful world,
We who had unrolled ourselves as a carpet under your feet.

Tara Singh's latest work, *Suraj da Letter Box* (The Letter-box of the Sun) presents much maturer poetry and in this he takes a position more or less directly opposed to that of the progressive poets. He takes the view that poetry is essentially an expression of intimate personal experience. To make it a vehicle of collective thinking and feeling is to dilute it.

SSS

A journalist by profession, he wields his pen with remarkable ease. Simplicity of diction is the hallmark of his poetry. He talks in the everyday idiom of the ordinary people and composes poetry on commonplace happenings, weaving commonplace utterances:

I have a friend
He is in love with a girl
With a view to finding his address
She has visited me
In this my room a couple of times.

(Aashnai—Acquaintance)

Irked by the social reality of hypocrisy, false values and corrupt practices, he fires salvos of satire. It is biting. It is rapier-like. It is all venom. There is no such thing as a mere sting. He attacks to kill, to demolish the castles of untruth and falsehood:

If I didn't understand what you said
Or maybe you couldn't explain yourself
Shame on both of us,
More on you.

(Vidwan—Scholar)

Those who were short-statured
They assembled four bricks
Beneath their feet
And became tall enough!

(Saza Kinhi Ku Baqi Hai?—
How much more is the Punishment?)

Under the sway of Urdu poetry, Tara Singh has written a number of perceptive *ghazals* woven with fine gossamers of imagery, which are marked for their liquid lyricism.

For some time past he has been publishing an insignificant weekly paper in which the only worthwhile presentation is a satirical poem in each issue against one politician or another. He has published some of these in book-form under the title *Nath Bani* (The Word of a Nath).

KSD

Satyapal Anand (b. 1931)

Satyapal Anand, author of a collection of Punjabi *ghazals, Ghazal*

Ghazal Darya (A River of Ghazals) is a versatile creative writer and a literary connoisseur. It is not a river but a virtual avalanche of *ghazals* which sweeps the reader along both by its liquid lyricism, that is the essence of *ghazal* as an art-form and the rich thought-content which is almost an exclusive preserve of Anand as a *ghazal*-writer in Punjabi. A sheaf of 80 *ghazals* with a bunch of 43 *rubaiyat* and *quattas*, the collection is a landmark in Punjabi literature. *Ghazal* in Punjabi is no more a flippant vehicle of mere romantic outpourings, it is as philosophic and as thought-provoking as poetry at its best could be. It is no more a dialogue with the sweetheart alone, it is also a dialogue with the self. With one big stride Anand has brought Punjabi *ghazal* to vie with the best that we have in this form in Urdu whether in India or in Pakistan, whether it is the old master like Firaq and Faiz or the new practitioners like Hasan Naeem and Kumar Pashi. The poet has eminently succeeded in marrying the traditional aura of *ghazal* with the essential flavour of Punjabi poetry and fitting them both in the sensibility of the new man belonging to a new habitat like say, Chandigarh.

Here are a few quotations sampling this delectable fare in translation:

It was a long way finding the meaning of life;
Getting out of the self and then getting into it.

Behind which is heard the melody of the spring of love
Let us go upto the last hillock of lust.

Come and watch the spectacle of mute longings
My body hangs from a peg in the wall.

KSD

Ajaib Kamal (b. 1932)

Ajaib Kamal is a major poet and has published 24 poetic works comprising 7 collections of poems, 12 longer poems and 5 plays in verse. It seems, he has been overtaking the literary critic in Punjabi. However, he has yet to be given his due place. Not bothered about awards or recognition he continues to pursue his writing as vigorously as ever. He refuses to adhere to the accepted norms of form and time-honoured concepts prevalent in his society:

The tree that must flourish in the heavens
Is yet entangled in the heavenly vines;

The free identity of poetry
Is yet shackled in the mysteries of grammar.

In spite of his prolificacy, it is never that he strikes a false note. He knows what he has to say and how he is going to say it. And yet at times, he gives the impression that in his anxiety to appear modern, he assumes postures that are more shocking in appearance. For instance, his so-called non-*ghazals* are as good as any *ghazal*-writing done in the language. At times, he is as charming and as profound as old masters.

They say catch him, he is a dacoit, a thief and a robber
I say—I am a poet, I sit and compose verse.

Those who are conceived in tubes
Are these the same people?

War and bombardment, dacoity and kickbacks,
hunger and rape.
How much agony the two pages of newspaper carry!

What Kamal styles as "mini" and "macro" poems are nothing but poetry written in the idiom and manner of a forward new writer. I find hardly any difference between his utterances and those of Tara Singh, or Surjit Pattar.

However, what one admires in Ajaib Kamal is that he is not completely swept away by the tide. Like his other celebrated contemporaries, he strikes a healthy note which is a great deal reassuring. His sympathies are with the peasant and the labourer. He is against warmongers and destroyers of peace on earth:

Brethren! How is it
In the ploughed and tended fields
You sow wheat
And swords are sprouted
You sow corn
And guns are grown?

KSD

Jagtar Singh (b. 1933)

Jagtar Singh Jagtar entered the field of Punjabi poetry as a young romantic with his collections, *Ruttan Rangilian* (Colourful Seasons), *Shokhian Ranginian* (Dazzling Colours) and *Dudh Pathri* (Milky

Stones). It was in the last named that there appeared some promise of his coming achievement, as, in his own words:

> Somewhere at last a town will come,
> When this aimless wandering will find a shore.

He proceeded thence to join the army of the progressives when he gave the slogan:

> Clerks, labourers, mill workers, peasants
> poets, men of letters, artists, young people
> Write songs of life, of truth.

But the progressive creed could not keep him long. He joined the caravan of the experimentalists with *Adhura Adami* (Incomplete Man). But such modernism was something too experimental for him and he walked over into the crowd of militants:

> On the way that we have followed,
> There are towns of crosses, rivers of blood, places of
> execution,
> Forests of swords, quagmires,
> What more lies on this path, we do not know.

It seems Jagtar has always been under fear of being left alone, so that he has joined one group of travellers or another. Ordinarily such a person is not expected to make good in any line. But an inborn talent has saved him from being lost in these crowds. He calls this repeated changeover as an angle which exists in the meeting of two lines. He is afraid of continuing along a single line and yet he cannot live without following a line somewhere. Thus he not only keeps up with life but also changes direction as if he is afraid of death standing in front of him. As he says:

> I am not a believer in any tradition.
> Choose for me a new way of dying.
> I do not relish a death that has got worn out.
> I want a death fresh, of a new kind, like a naked truth.

SSS

Sohan Singh Misha (1934–86)

Sohan Singh Misha is more sophisticated in his subject matter and equally more disciplined in his vocabulary, which is as simple

as the language of the common man. He deals with the trivial complications and minor stresses in the life of the urban middle class, the petit bourgeoisie. This is perhaps a rare combination in Punjabi poetry. In his simple vocabulary Misha is able to express the popular dissatisfaction with our social and economic system, in a way which is as dramatic as the speech of the common man. Yet he is faithful to the progressive tradition and gives it a new dimension, in as much as he refrains from striking heroic poses. In fact, he is a poet of the unheroic. This is also a deliberate pose, for he employs in this a devastating irony, and perhaps because he is so restrained and selective in both matter and manner, that he has refrained from being prolific. He published only four volumes: *Chauraha* (Crossway), *Dastak* (Knock on the Door), *Kach de Vastar* (Clothes of Glass) and *Dhime Bol* (Soft Tones). The title of this last, indeed, sums up the low-tone character of his verse.

Indeed a low-tone lyricism characterises all his verse. He is seldom careless or faltering in his rhythms. His verse is a pleasant combination of statement and image. As such he has written very competently in the *ghazal* form also.

SSS

Misha represents the best traditions of Punjabi poetry. He is neither a traditionalist, nor an avowed experimentalist; with him Punjabi poetry appears to move forward in its course on an even keel. While reading his verse, it seems as if Mohan Singh were striding forward. It is the same familiar diction. It is the same familiar predilection for internal rhymes and not too strange patterns in form. Indeed if Mohan Singh had been born a couple of decades later he would have written a poem like "Cheek Bulbuli". There is a strident note of satire on our so-called free society that is captive to its self-imposed norms. With all the freedom of self-expression guaranteed in the statute-book one cannot cry out one's heart:

Now I long
To stand up in Gandhi Chowk
Near the courts;
With the full force of my throat
I long to raise a cry
And a rebel yell.
I long to snatch away the stick of the march of Dandi
From the hands of a smiling statue of Gandhi

And smash my head.
Smeared in blood.
I long to fall at his feet
And before breathing my last
I long to chant
Ram, Ram.

What is perhaps most remarkable in Misha's poetry is the note of sincerity. Like a large number of his contemporaries, he doesn't wear any mask. Most of our writers today are used to pre-determined postures, they are divided into well marked out camps. Misha tries to be himself and has eminently succeeded in it. He hates hypocrisy and the insincerity of modern life. There are several poems like "Udghatan" (Inauguration), "Nate da Nam Karan", (Giving name to a Relation), "Davat ton Baad" (After the Party) in which he ridicules the discomfiture of the modern man trying to be what he is not.

However, what seems to disappoint the reader is the poet's endeavour not to involve himself in serious argument, far less in any conflict. He is content with laughing at the frailties and indecencies of modern living but does not seem to challenge them. Maybe this is the limitation of a creative writer who opted to serve in a government department. Far from fighting for the causes dear to his heart, a government employee must steer clear of all controversy. Rather than saying what is in his heart, Misha prefers walking through the crowd close-lipped, shutting his ears to the noise around him!

Such limitations at times endow creative writing with the charm born out of a difficulty overcome. Misha resorts to symbolism and subtleties of expression, a highly suggestive imagery, similes and metaphors and in consequence, more often than not succeeds in conveying what he wishes to say. But there are elements in our society who insist that a creative writer must belong to some camp. Those who are not on their side are necessarily on the opposite side. To be a progressive writer, it is maintained, one must align oneself with a particular party. This is perhaps not fair to a creative writer in a free society. A writer cannot suffer the stranglehold of political discipline. Misha broke many such barriers and also paid heavily for it.

KSD

Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia (b. 1937)

Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia knocked his way into the field of experimentalism as a departure from the dominant school of Punjabi poetry, the Progressives, the leaders of which, Mohan Singh and Amrita Pritam, received his particular attention. Denigrating the progressive poetry of this school as a mixture of romanticism and socialist propaganda, he declared it to have become outworn with the achievement of independence and the subsequent launching of the Indian Government's five-year plans, to build an industrial society. The imagery and the use of figures of speech like metonym of the Mohan Singh–Amrita Pritam school depended, as he correctly noticed, too much on the humanisation of nature, in the way of the English romantics of the early 19th century, to which socialist slogans were added. Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia pointed out that poetry in the new industrial economy building up in the Indian Union needed a new imagery and a new rhetoric, and the new human being was no longer a romantic dreamer of independence, freedom and social equality, but a split personality torn between the old feudal mode of living and thinking and the new conditions taking shape in the process of industrialisation. This society needed a poetry that should not make man look back towards a pastoral age but bring him to grips with the rapidly spreading industrial milieu. He called the kind of verse that he was himself experimenting with to suit the new age *Prayogvadi* (experimentalist), taking its imagery from life in the factory, the commercial establishments and from the mental situation created by its compulsions.

He made a powerful impact on his immediate and younger contemporaries who seemed to be in a rush to unite under the new banner. He sought to strengthen the new imagery by connecting it with old and pristine legend, thus eliminating the pastoral, feudal age altogether. His first collection of poems was entitled *Kaghaj da Ravana* (The Paper Demon), which was followed by *Koor Raja Koor Parja* (False King False Subjects) and *Sach ki Bela* (The Moment of Truth). The last two titles are taken from Guru Nanak's hymns which are in their own way repudiations of the ethos and thinking of the feudal age.

Of these poems, the main characteristics are intellectual irony and a cynical attitude towards progressive and popular political

and social ideas and movements. He chooses to call his mode and manner of writing radical realism, to distinguish it from the more prevalent progressivism often confused by its critics with socialist realism.

SSS

When agonised at the storming of the Golden Temple, Jasbir Singh wails with a bleeding heart, though a State servant, he must observe restraint. And this lends intensity and a characteristic punch to what he says. His verse is poignant and pungent. It is choked and yet articulate:

Wounds must speak
If you don't speak now
When would you do so?

Ruins must cry
If you don't cry now
When would you do so?

Tears must drop
If you don't drop them now
When would you do so?

Babbers must growl
If you don't growl now
When would you do so?

The falcons must pounce
If you don't pounce now
When would you do so?

The Siddhas must descend
If you don't descend now
When would you do so?

What is most distinctive about Jasbir's poetry is the element of satire in it. It is severely biting. He stings to inflict pain. He slaps the face. He does not mince words but makes them fatal. He attacks to kill. Smacked with his blows, the cheeks burn long:

In the battlefield Arjun awaits the brahmjnani
And the brahmjnani is busy in an inaugural ceremony.

And the remarkable feature of his craftmanship is that Jasbir does it all with classical characters hovering around

and more often than not in the idiom of the epics. The weapons that he employs are double-edged. They laugh at the times gone by, as well as lay bare the frailties of the contemporary scene—a past master in it, he does it with consummate skill.

While as a satirist Jasbir resorts to symbols frequently, he does not tax his reader's imagination unduly. It is because he reflects the social problems that are nearer our heart and the maladies that need urgent attention. He spares none. He lashes out at high and low. At times he attempts variation of popular folk-tales and drives his message home unmistakably. His poem "Sher Bakri te Budhijeevi" (The Lion, Goat and the Intellectual) illustrates this formulation remarkably.

Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia has undisputedly carved out for himself a niche amongst the immortals of the new Punjabi poetry. He is no more "a poet of dissent". He is himself a stalwart practitioner of the Punjabi poetry today. With him contemporary Punjabi verse takes a significant stride forward.

KSD

Ravinder Ravi (b. 1937)

Of all the expatriates writing Punjabi verse, Ravinder Ravi and Ajaib Kamal are perhaps the most active; Ravi more than Kamal. Their output is amazing; so is the level of their performance, Ravi has recently collected his verse in three volumes—*Akath Katha* (Untold Story) in which he has included his poetry written between 1955 and 1966, *Van Vani* (Jungle Talk) containing poetry written between 1967 and 1974 and *Piasa Badal* (The Thirsty Cloud) devoted to later verse written mainly in Canada.

A teacher by profession, Ravinder Ravi worked in Kenya for some time before he shifted to Canada where he seems to have settled. However, he keeps in constant touch with the Punjab and remains deeply involved in the happenings back home. More, he identifies himself with the trends in writing in his mother-tongue. He belongs to the coterie of experimentalists, yet he maintains a distinct identity.

He has carved out for himself a niche in Punjabi writing as a poet of dissent. His phrases, idioms, similes and metaphors have a flavour of their own. He creates an entirely new imagery. There is a gossamer-like delicacy about his verse and yet it is

realistic, earthy and sensuous. He seldom compromises on artistic excellence.

As asserted by Dr. Harbhajan Singh, here is a Punjabi poet who is an expatriate not only physically but psychologically as well. The consciousness of alienation seems to haunt him. His is a search for identity, an endeavour for integration. Says he:

I am an expatriate
When I move out with my kit
The paths must give way.

A poet who belongs to the age of science and technology, he maps out for himself appropriate themes and carves out convenient formats to do justice to what he has to say. He wishes to reach beyond himself, integrate with that being which is outside his physical self, yearning for the cosmic reality. Says Ravi:

I am the past, I am the future
I am timeless
All the ages I carry within me.

Life and art are complementary. The poet wishes to fulfil himself through his writing. The greater the urge the more the writing. And this seems to explain Ravinder Ravi's prodigious output which seems to outdo any other creative writer in the language with poetry, drama, short fiction and reflective prose!

The fact of creativity and the concrete achievement, as a practising craftsman lends a confidence which finds expression in optimism in Ravi that is most unlike his fellow travellers who just marvel in the exuberance of dissent:

Travelling from the questions
I have arrived at the answers.

The times must change
The homeless must find a home.

The experimentalists are more active everywhere. Those writing in Punjabi are a serious lot of crusaders with firm faith in their chosen path. They devise new moulds, adopt fresh formats and have for their contents their own set of convictions. What is surprising is that most of them are decent and devoted rather than angry and annoying.

Ravi is no non-serious youth interested more in demolishing

temples of tradition, rather than making a worthwhile contribution. There is amazing maturity both of form and content in his work. Calling Ravi and a number of others like Ajaib Kamal and Dr. Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia experimentalists is more for the convenience of categorizing them than anything else; they have definitely "arrived" and have added a new dimension to Punjabi poetry. Ravi's imagery and diction are fresh and yet familiar.

Come,
Let us open up with each other
Come,
Let us mix up with each other
And this way find ourselves
Let the intellect remain in the shoes
And the shoes remain in the street,
Let us not just look at each other's overflowing pools,
Let us plunge into them.

Ravi's poetry has a number of compositions written under the influence of Jenusian thinking according to which "two or more antitheses are conceived simultaneously, either as existing side by side, or as equally operative, valid, or true—it is a leap that transcends ordinary logic". Some of the couplets illustrating this blending of antagonistic elements in Ravi are:

In the waters of the lake
The river flows,

Every river has a calm lake
Sitting in meditation.

Those who talk green
Graze on dry leaves.

Ravi is a pastmaster in antithesis. His silence speaks. His tears smile. His dirge dances.

KSD

Sukhpalvir Singh Hasrat (b. 1938)

Hasrat has published to date a number of collections. *Sarsabz Patajharan* (Green Autumns), *Husn Kinare* (Banks of Beauty), *Hayati de Some* (The Sources of Life), *Moh Maya* (Infatuation), *Shakti Nad* (The Music of Power), *Suraj da Kafila* (The Caravan of the Sun).

Starting as a traditional formalist, he joined the band of the Progressives and later defected to Jasbir Singh's experimentalism. In *Shakti Nad* he has come out with his new concept of *Shakti* or power to which creed he has stuck to date. An extravagant fancy, a prolific vocabulary and a desire to join every passing movement have characterised his career as a poet. His creed of power perhaps owes its origin to the late Urdu and Persian poet Mohammed Iqbal. Hasrat does not, of course, possess the great qualities of Iqbal, but he is perhaps for that very reason less paradoxical and illogical in his views, maybe because he does not have to justify a much worn-out creed.

SSS

Surjit Patar (b. 1945)

Surjit has written the most exquisite lyrical verse in the present generation, on the lines of Mohan Singh and Shiv Kumar. He has perhaps brought more refined irony to bear upon contemporary events. So far he has published only one slim collection of his poems, *Hava Vich Likhe Harf* (Characters Written on the Wind) (1978) but has published more of his poems in periodicals.

SSS

The most striking feature of Patar's verse is a gentle note of satire and his total identification with those who are for revolution:

This Punjab spanning two rivers and a half,
Maybe belongs to a political leader;
I am not a leader,
My Punjab was done to death
A long time ago.
And in its hands
Something like this was found written:
"No one killed me,
I was not dismembered by anyone,
I committed suicide."

Those for whom I became a bridge,
When they were walking over me
I overheard them remark
"Where has he disappeared?
He was a quiet sort,
He must have gone back,

Not that we were not aware of it,
He never had the guts."

Then I feel like asking the guerilla in the jungle,
"Here is a sheaf of my poems,
You may burn them
And warm yourself".
I wish to hear the melody of the bullet
Shot from his gun's barrel;
The violence could also be so poetic
I never could imagine.

Don't you be so truthful that you are left alone
You must have at least four men
To give shoulder to your coffin.

KSD

Among other poets of similar commitment to poetry may be mentioned Sati Kumar, Harnam, Mohanjit, Dev and Manjit Tiwana, as the most remarkable.

Sati Kumar now lives in Sweden; he is perhaps the most conscious poet of this generation in his concept of the modern and new sensibility. He does not remain content with the modernity of the generation before him. In his rebellion against tradition at its newest, he becomes a prophet of anti-poetry. He eschews ali earlier influences, progressive as well as aesthetic. Idealism and romanticism have no meaning for him. However, he can be connected with the surrealist and absurdist view of poetry, for instance, in lines such as:

I run inward and in that inward,
I look for my arms in my arms,
Feet in my feet.

He seems to believe that everything in the outer world has broken down. Man has no present, no existence of his own. He is caught up in the past in traditional and moral values which make him feel that his lips that kiss his beloved are like his father's, the nose of his beloved is like that of her mother. He is drawn on one side by the past and on the other by the future. Like most modern poets he believes that it is enough for poetry to be expressed in symbols and images further than which there is no poetic responsibility.

Mohanjit also believes in the poetic self-sufficiency of image and symbol as when he says:

> Those who have to fight
> Will use every tactic
> Have to besiege this seasonal civilization
> If you can rain a scorpion's involved expression
> We also know how to lift a cow to the upper storey.

Harnam also seems to believe that irony and negation are enough for poetry. He is not satisfied with man's consciousness of history and aesthetic sense which he dubs as semitic by which term he perhaps tries to convey a quality of the feudal age. And he tries to create a new pattern for the poetry of the new age.

Dev spent a large part of his early life in Kenya in Africa. In life, as he has seen it in Africa, he sees a challenge to the future of the white Western civilization as when he says:

> I do not want the moon,
> The achievement of the twentieth century
> I return the total flood of my stream
> Give me the sad lines of a Negro's lips
> The dark complexion of the Dark Continent.

His experience is a collage of jazz and the noise and din of cities, which cannot be expressed in lyrical and romantic tones, and so it makes him write:

> I long to come down from the sacred cross,
> I want to walk forgetful of myself
> Where the blade of the knife shines,
> From one corner to another
> Of the eye of the builder
> Where a sea of rebellious horses neighs.

Dev proceeds from the assumption of his broken-down personality:

> I am an age-old ache
> That has awakened from stones
> And going into space
>
> I have lost my connection with habitations
> I am looking for a connection.

Every art makes a search for this lost connection or expresses the fact of this loss. But the tragedy of modernist art and poetry is that it stops at that. It does not strive to build any new connection.

Manjit Tiwana has published so far two collections of poems. *Ilham* (Inspiration) and *Ilzam* (Accusation). Tiwana uses sensitive images with a psychological background of which as a woman she has perhaps a keener experiential sense, her boldness is impressive and she never slips into the profane and seldom into the banal.

SSS

Newest of the New

Moving into the twentieth century, we have two broadly marked signposts in Punjabi letters called Modern Writing followed by New Writing. The Modern Period was ushered in with Bhai Vir Singh. It was overtaken by what came to be known as New Writing with the advent of the Progressives in the forties. The agony that Punjab has had in its lot to suffer of late has thrown up another definitive category of writers, more especially in the realm of poetry who could be called Newest of the New.

Their verse written under the shadow of death is born out of the soil, it reflects the current milieu and yet there is nothing ephemeral or what is termed 'topical' about it. It is perceptive, has a marked character and complexion of its own and bids to be abiding. What is most remarkable about this crop of writers is that they are far superior in talent to their predecessors amongst the Modernists and the Progressives at their age. Barring Bhai Vir Singh, Mohan Singh, 'Safeer' and Amrita Pritam, the general run of them were certainly not as sensitive, as reflective or as technically innovative.

What the new generation has in its favour is that its postulates are uniformly free from the elitism of the Modernists and the dogmatic absolutism of the Progressives. They are strictly democratic. Theirs is essentially confessional poetry. It has its own romantic and lyrical charm. Their clinical confessionalism, incidentally, helps build a bridge over the sunken road between the Modernists and the Progressives of yesteryear. Unlike Progressives, they give due regard to the tradition of poetic craftsmanship. The pursuit of form is a sort of creed for them. Equipped thus, they eminently succeed in uttering the unutterable. They astound, they hurt, they provoke and yet they are acceptable.

They are intense and delicately beautiful and at the same time personal and realistic.

The Modernists marked a departure from the medieval writing. They tended to be elitist. Bhai Vir Singh studiously steered clear even of the freedom struggle. Living in Amritsar, he did not take notice of the Jallianwala Bagh tragedy that moved poet Tagore to renounce his knighthood. The Progressives were much too preoccupied with the havenots, the suppressed and the downtrodden. Between these two extremes, there was a silence that needed articulation. The Newest of the New sing of this silence. More important names among them are: Surjit Patar, Mohanjit, Tara Singh, Jagtar, Manjit Tiwana, Joga Singh, Harbhajan Halwarwi, Jaswant Deed and Swrajbir (S.B. Singh).

The political instability, communal alienation and religious fundamentalism seem to torture the soul of the younger generation of Punjabi poets today as nothing else does. Maybe they got the cue from Amrita Pritam when she said:

> May God help this household
> Where Ranjha used to dwell
> One hears the footsteps of Khedas.

Recalling the holocaust of Partition when Muslims were alienated from Hindus and Sikhs, Surjit Patar cautions about another vivisection that may lead to distancing the Sikhs from Hindus.

> We divided Waris Shah the other day,
> Is it Shiv Kumar's turn today?

The people of Punjab are unusually attached to their soil, its mountains, its rivers, its lush green crops. Says Puran Singh, the savant, 'I have gone around the whole world; nowhere did I find the water as sweet, nowhere did I breathe the air as salubrious as that of Punjab.' Despite the shadow of terror with 10–20 killings a day, the countryside of Punjab is as peaceful as the towns that hum with activity. Visiting Punjab seems to belie stories figuring in the press. Mohanjit, a more committed protagonist of his group, articulates this love-hate complex in these words:

> I was born here
> I was brought up here
> I am the glory of this soil
> And also its dirge.

The agony that the people of Punjab have suffered for all these long years, whether it was pulling members of one community out of buses and doing them to death or spraying bullets indiscriminately in streets and mowing down innocent men, women and children, whether it was Operation Bluestar or 1984 frenzy of Sikh baiting consequent upon Smt. Indira Gandhi's savage assassination, it has left the sensitive soul of the young Punjabi poet seared. They go back to it again and again. It finds its expression in many voices and at various levels.

Manjit Tiwana, the winner of the Sahitya Akademi Award is bewildered:

> What times are these
> Sitting on the threshold of it
> We ask the whereabouts of our home!

Halwarwi is more scared. In his poem entitled "Parbat" (Mountain) he says:

> There is emptiness on the peaks.
> We may get lost,
> Let's return to the warmth of our home.

Minder articulates the dilemma of millions of his fellow Punjabis who are witness to heartless killing by the misled militants as also of the security forces engaged in fake and not-so-fake encounters in pursuance of the diabolic strategy of bullet-for-bullet, and do not know whom to blame:

> I had a blanket on my shoulders
> And a flute in my hand
> I went nowhere, nor did I sleep;
> Who has handed over this gun
> And left a dead body in my arms?

Jaswant Deed, the author of *Bacche Ton Dardi Kavita* (Verse Fearing the Child) uses child as a symbol for the innocent, peaceful and God-fearing Punjabi with dreams in his eyes:

> What song they sing in the town
> That I fear
> My child may be disturbed in his sleep!

The younger generation Punjabi poet delves in darkness, looks

for the chaotic order, tries to integrate form and content, makes his poetry correspond to the breath and pulse and the movement of his mind. He has heretical distrust of language. Jaswant Deed again:

> I detest the word Shanti.
> It remains metamorphosed on paper;
> It is conflict that prevails all over life.

Having seen the miserable performance of their politicians and the establishment refusing to shake off the British-groomed tradition of commitment only to the chair, the poet in Jagtar cautions the reader:

> When I am no more, friends!
> You can be a boat,
> You can also be a spinning-wheel,
> You may be a multi-coloured stool,
> Even a rocker,
> But don't you ever be a chair.

Another feature of this group of Punjabi poets is the overwhelming participation of women writers in it. Numerically and also, perhaps, qualitatively they seem to outdo their male counterparts. More important among them are: Manjit Tiwana, Pal Kaur, Surjit Kalsi, Nirupma Dutt, Gaggan Gill, Ka Na Singh, Amar Jyoti, Kamal Ikarsi and Vineeta. They view the man-woman relation in a more liberal form. Their earlier generation woman poet never felt complete without man. This is sustained no more. Manjit Tiwana tries to give a new meaning to the status of woman in our society. The woman in her verse begs for no sympathy, nor does she ask for equality. She believes woman is woman and man is man; woman is differernt from man but in no way inferior. She has demonstrated the glory of woman in her longer poem entitled *Savitri*, published in book-form. Amar Jyoti has called her collection of poems *Mainun Sita Na Kaho* (Don't You Call Me Sita). Here is one of the poems entitled 'Kaun Buddha Si?' (Who Was Buddha?):

> Whose tale is it?
> It's left for you to decide,
> Whether of Yashodhara or Siddhartha
> Who repaired to the peace of the jungle

Leaving Yashodhara behind
To bring up Rahul
Congruent with royal
Customs and traditions,
Who made the glittering glass-house of her life a ruin
Behind the portals of a palace,
Where her sight turned into an unending path
Waiting for Siddhartha.
And when he returned from the quiet of the peaceful abode
As Buddha, the wise,
Who was enlightened,
Siddhartha or Yashodhara?

They are totally secular in outlook. They equal Godhead with aesthetic sensibility which is the source of their poetry. Their endeavour is to arrive at the outside by moving inward. They tear down the walls of high culture. Creativity for them is liberation of the imagination.

Maybe the times they live in have something to do with conditioning their identity and shaping their personality. Their predecessors had just one university in the undivided Punjab; there are as many as four in the patitioned and vivisected Punjab today. They have a new middle class to cater to. The new life makes a lonely modern man. Gossiping has already ceased to be a popular pastime. The proliferation of media activity has introduced them to ever so many models of expression, each serving as a catalytic agent. To crown it all, the inroads from the countryside to the towns have brought about a new sensibility. Their values are in a flux, a rich harvest for the creative writer to exploit.

The only charge against them is that they believe in nothing. Believing in nothing is still a belief!

KSD

12

Fiction

Bhai Vir Singh (1872–1957)

Bhai Vir Singh's greatest contribution to modern Punjabi literature, next only to his poetic writings, is his four novels, *Sundari*, *Bijay Singh* and *Sukhwant Kaur* (two parts) which are more properly to be called historical romances and *Subhag Ji da Sudhar Rahin Baba Naudh Singh* (briefly called Baba Naudh Singh) which is an imaginative account of Punjabi life during the first two decades of the 20th century with a decisively religious propagandist purpose stretched at places too long to preserve the appearance of a narrative of social conditions and events. The first named three works are imaginative accounts of the struggle that the Sikhs waged against the Mughal empire in the second quarter of the 18th century when Keshadhari Sikhs were treated as outlaws and hunted from villages and towns to be butchered. The Sikhs formed themselves into bands that marauded mostly the houses of the Mughal Afghan landlords and Faujdars and even the Hindu collaborators of the Mughal government. *Sundari* is mainly the story of a Khatri girl Saraswati, later named Sundar Kaur or Sundari on initiation into the Sikh faith. She is carried away by a Mughal officer from her parents' home on the very eve of her marriage, when her elder brother who had already become a Sikh under the name of Balwant Singh and had joined a band of Sikh soldiers comes to her rescue and rescues her from captivity. She also joined her brother's band and the story then meanders along with her capture again and again by Mughal officers and rescue by one Sikh band or another. At the height of the account she is brought to the harem of the Governor of Lahore where she resists all temptations of a good life as the Governor's wife and over and

above succeeds in preserving her chastity, helped by coincidences that are the staple of historical romances even in the writings of a master like Sir Walter Scott, whom Bhai Vir Singh obviously adopts as his model.

Bijay Singh is similarly the story of a Hindu youth Ram Lal, who much to the distress of his parents becomes a Sikh under the name of Bijay Singh. The crest of his adventure and escapades is reached when he becomes a prisoner of the Governor of Lahore who is at this time the widow and successor of Mir Moinul-Mulk, known in Sikh chronicles as Mir Mannu. The Begum is so impressed by Bijay Singh's demeanour and wisdom that she does not shrink from consulting him in her political concerns. She ultimately falls in love with him and offers to marry him if he should become a Muslim. Bijay Singh resists all these temptations and is in the end delivered from prison by a coincidence little short of a miracle.

Satwant Kaur is a longer story with greater complications. She is abducted along with her infant son from her husband's home at Khanna and ultimately finds herself in the Governor's house at Kabul. There, miraculously, the Amir's wife takes care of her safety and chastity against the designs of her husband. She ultimately succeeds after many years in stealing out of the fort at Kabul along with her son who has now grown into a youth of eighteen and the Amir's wife herself; all three are able to find their way to a Sikh band of guerillas who bring them to Punjab. There her young son and companion, the Afghan Begum, are initiated into the Sikh faith.

As Bhai Vir Singh writes in the foreword to *Sundari*, his purpose in writing these accounts is to revive in the minds of the Sikhs of his time who under British and other influences had fallen from their earlier glory and taken to the ways of the British and Punjabi non-Sikhs, memories of the glorious achievements of their ancestors. Along with this Bhai Vir Singh declares his purpose to prove to his countrymen that the Punjabi language is a rich and capable medium for literary expression as much as the other Indian languages. For in those days most people in the Punjab considered Punjabi to be a patois or rustic dialect. In this purpose Bhai Vir Singh may be considered to have succeeded in a big way. Of course, his novels are lacking in realistic truth which is the primary concern of a novel; for Bhai Vir Singh delineates all his Sikh

characters as ideal in every way and presents the Mughal Afghan characters, except a stray one here and there, as oppressors of the Hindus and corrupt and evil in their personal lives. The Hindus are generally described as timid and subservient to the Mughals, though it is from their midst that the heroic Sikhs like Balwant Singh and Bijay Singh, Sundari and Satwant Kaur and nearly all others have emerged. Another class of Hindus, mostly on the upper rungs of the social ladder are shown as officials and collaborators of the Mughal regime who are more set than the Mughals themselves on destroying the Sikhs. The highest among this class are Dewan Lakhpati Rai and Jaspat Rai of Eminabad. The former is shown as chasing and hemming numerous Sikh bands into a narrow area around Lake Kahunwan (at present in Gurdaspur district) and destroying large numbers of them. The series of these happenings are remembered in Sikh annals as *Chhota Ghalughara* or the smaller holocaust. Lakhpat Rai has an added motive in this, that is, revenge against the death of his younger brother Jaspat Rai in an earlier action against the Sikh guerillas. As against this, there is a class of Hindu officials of high rank, like Dewan Kaura Mal and Dewan Surat Singh serving the Governor of Lahore who are in sympathy with the victims and try to soften the impact of Mughal oppression on the Sikhs. Incidentally, Bhai Vir Singh himself was a descendant of Dewan Kaura Mal.

The stories have considerable merit as pioneering attempts and provide quite interesting reading to Sikh youth and even those of maturer age for their sentimental appeal.

In *Baba Naudh Singh* the nucleus of the story is the fate of a Hindu widow, Subhag Wanti, who is saved from jumping into the Ravi by a Christian missionary after which she is offered deliverance from her cruel lot if she becomes a Christian; then by a Muslim Moulvi who would like to induct her into the Muslim faith, but she is ultimately converted to Sikhism and led to a happy and secure life by Baba Naudh Singh. The Baba is also a great social reformer, teaching the Sikh villagers to refrain from group rivalries and feuds. The Muslim villagers likewise imbibe his benign influence. A Sikh physician and a Sikh lawyer who have got westernised owing to their secular education also receive his healing touch and return to the orthodox Sikh way of life. The second

half of the novel consists mostly of preaching the Sikh doctrine to those who have strayed from the fold.

SSS

Charan Singh Shahid (1887–1935)

Charan Singh Shahid was initially a semi-educated village youth with an ambition for worldly success which he seems to have achieved amply in his own small way. Starting as a journalist he affixed to his name the initials of his father, Sukha Singh, and thus wrote his name as S.S. Charan Singh Shahid—Shahid being the name of his village. He wrote among other things two historical romances, *Daler Kaur* and *Chanchal Murti*, in the line started by Bhai Vir Singh and a novel *Do Vahutian* (Two Wives) which describes the miserable plight of a man who has two wives and is torn into nervous shreds in the midst of their quarrels and conflicting claims upon his attention. As in the case of Bhai Vir Singh's romances, *Daler Kaur*, a young Sikh woman who is abducted from her husband's home by a Mughal officer and brought to the Governor's palace at Lahore, resists all efforts of the Governor and his agents to convert her to Islam and is ultimately rescued by a Sikh band. In *Chanchal Murti*, a Sikh guerilla, Chanchal Singh, is taken prisoner in battle against a Mughal detachment and brought to and incarcerated in the Red Fort at Delhi where a royal princess falls in love with him. Chanchal Singh escapes from the Fort along with the princess who gets converted to Sikhism and is married to him. Thus the novel strikes a change upon the pattern adopted by Bhai Vir Singh whose hero Bijay Singh does not fall under the blandishments of even the Begum of Lahore. This may be for two reasons—both of course fictional, one that Bijay Singh already had a Sikh wife and the Begum was so situated that she could not run away with him or marry him even if he got converted to Islam. As against this Charan Singh's Chanchal Singh is unmarried and his princess is only one of so many in the royal harem.

Charan Singh has written considerable verse in a humorous vein of which *Badshahian* is the best collection. But his more monumental work is a weekly, *Mauji*, devoted to wit and humour of a hilarious kind. The journal had a serial in the form of a long narrative published in weekly instalments, whose hero is named Baba Waryama.

Charan Singh also published a number of novels translated from Bengali and Hindi.

SSS

Bhai Mohan Singh Vaid (1881–1936)

Bhai Mohan Singh Vaid is not a writer at par with Bhai Vir Singh and Charan Singh, for most of his novels are adaptations from Bengali and Hindi, representing contemporary life. They are reformist in content with the clear aim of bringing back to the Sikh fold young people who have strayed from Sikh orthodoxy under Western influences and fallen into sinful and luxurious ways. The better known and perhaps better constructed of them are *Ik Sikh Gharana* (A Sikh Household), *Sukhi Parivar* (A Happy Family), *Sresht Kulan di Chal* (The Way of Life of Noble Families), *Sushil Vidhwa* (A Virtuous Widow), *Subhag Kaur* (A Fortunate Wife), *Dampati Pyar* (A Loving Couple). Mohan Singh Vaid condemns people who, adopting the Western way of life, become irreligious and immoral, but at the same time he exhorts them to copy them in the economic field, by adopting scientific methods of cultivation as known in his time and taking to small-scale industries. He wants the Sikh boys and girls to get high education available in schools and colleges set up or encouraged by the British rulers, preferably from denominational Sikh schools. Thus the problems posed and solutions offered are typical of the cultural duality engendered by British rule.

SSS

Minor Works

Master Tara Singh who led the Akali Movement from the early twenties till his death in the sixties, wrote two novels, one of which *Prem Lagan* (A Life of Devotion) describes the social and political concerns of the Sikhs in the earlier half of the 20th century, affording a realistic account of the unruly and unwise mutual conflicts among Sikh families which emerge into a sublimation through the Akali and nationalist political struggle. *Baba Tega Singh* is the story of a soldier who had taken part in the battle of Sabraon and tasted the humiliation of defeat, lives his remaining years undaunted by the oppression that many survivers of the Khalsa army were subjected to in the early days of British rule in the Punjab.

Among other minor works of fiction of this period may be mentioned *Chup Prit* (Silent Love) by Prof. Puran Singh known for his poems and essays in Punjabi and voluminous writings both prose and verse in English. It is a beautiful idealistic account of an Arab couple who imbibe the teachings of Guru Nanak during their brief visit to Baghdad. Prof. Ishwar Chander Nanda has written the story of a boy of the Mirasi caste who, attracted by performances of roving players, follows a party of them to Lahore where he achieves great success as an actor. He is followed by a girl of his village, who acts as heroine against him in the theatre and becomes his legal wife. He then calls his whole family from his village to share his prosperity. Nanda's long story, *Tej Kaur* is not worth serious notice. Prof. Niranjan Singh, younger brother of Master Tara Singh, wrote *Prem Kani* (The Drop of Love) which is a spiritual companion to his elder brother's *Prem Lagan*. Mir Bakhs Minhas wrote a short novel, *Nawab Khan*, the story of an improvident peasant who cracks under his heavy debts and is reduced to a pauper. In another novel entitled *Prabha* named after the heroine, Joshua Fazal Din relates the story of a sensitive girl, Prabha, who goes through much tribulation in the course of her love.

Gur Baksh Singh's first attempt in this genre, early in his writing career, *Anviahi Man* (Unmarried Mother) is about an unmarried mother in which the heroine survives the deadly burden of social odium through sheer moral courage. Gur Baksh Singh wrote a second novel towards the end of his career. It is entitled *Rukhan di Jirand* (Patience of the Trees). It is also a melodramatic story in his characteristic idealistic strain. The heroine is kidnapped in her childhood, and brought up by a prostitute from where she is rescued by a foreign engineer to become the mother of a lovely child. Here also Gur Baksh Singh has expounded his philosophy of equable or dispassionate love. But he has dealt realistically with the political events of those days like the visit of the Simon Commission to Lahore in 1928, when there was a hostile public demonstration against it and a baton charge by the police in which the leading congressman of those days, Lala Lajpat Rai, is hurt. Lajpat Rai's death within a week of this is believed to have been the prime incitement for the murder of a British police officer, Saunders, by Bhagat Singh and Raj Guru.

SSS

Nanak Singh (1897–1971)

Like most Hindu families in West Punjab in those days, Nanak Singh's parents were devoted to the Sikh faith. Their son Hans Raj became a full-fledged Sikh under the influence of the Singh Sabha Movement of the early twenties and was named Nanak Singh.He even went to jail for some time as an Akali satyagrahi.

He had already written songs of devotion to the Gurus and exhortations to the Sikhs to join the struggle for purging the Gurudwaras of hypocritical and depraved priests who were being supported by the British Government. They were published in book-form under the title of *Satiguru Mahima* (In Praise of True Guru). The book sold well and continued to bring him a fair amount of royalty to the end of his life and presumably his heirs now benefit by it too.

While in jail, Nanak Singh was brought by a fellow-prisoner Jagan Nath, to read Munshi Prem Chand's novels and it became his ambition to work for social reform emulating Prem Chand. It did not take him long to achieve this ambition.

After a few years of apprenticeship in which he wrote four short reformist novels in the romantic vein, he made his mark in Punjabi literature with *Chitta Lahu* (White Blood) in 1932.

Chitta Lahu is a transformation of Nanak Singh's own cruel experiences, though it is not at all autobiographical. The hero, Bachan Singh, is a young man who takes upon himself the onerous task of social reform of the kind Nanak Singh would have chosen for himself, had he not turned to novel-writing. Bachan Singh is essentially the *alter ego* of Nanak Singh substituting deed for word.

The story of this novel is rather involved. It looks as if Nanak Singh was determined to expose in this novel all the misdeeds and corruptions that are perpetrated by our feudal middle class. Gurdei is married young to an old man—the first instance of social oppression. When her aged husband dies soon after, her step-son keeps her out of all inheritance as sanctioned by law in those days. Her in-laws are so callous in their treatment of her that they turn her out of the house on a cold, gusty night. She finds shelter in the house of a kind-hearted Muslim woman, but when she comes back in the morning, she is declared an apostate for having eaten in a Muslim house. Apparently to help her, Pandit Radha Krishan sends her to one Tara Chand of Sialkot. But Tara

Chand proves no better. He deserts Gurdei when she falls ill and is pregnant with his child. In her forsaken condition, neighbouring Muslim women come to her aid and attend to her in child-birth. After some days when she returns to Tara Chand's house, nobody owns her. Again a scoundrel takes her in his charge, ostensibly as a helper. He takes her to Delhi where he sells her to a prostitute—the common lot that Nanak Singh, after Prem Chand, Sarat Bose, and other Indian novelists of the time, have for a forsaken Hindu widow.

To get rid of Gurdei's unwanted encumbrance, her infant daughter of a few days, the scoundrel places her under a bush, from where she is lifted by a juggler, Rodu.

As she grows up, this girl, Sundari dances her way, with her adopted father, to Bachan Singh's village, where a friend Didar Singh takes her away from Rodu to put her to school as is the girl's heart's desire. The evil men of the village have designs on Sundari's youth and beauty and Bachan Singh's fondness for her is an eyesore to them. When Bachan Singh marries Sundari, they get him ostracised by the village fraternity.

Gurdei who has earned some reputation as a dancing girl comes to the village to entertain a wedding party. Pandit Radha Krishan and her step-son arrange a night's entertainment with her but she stabs both of them to death. The evil men of the village, Pala Singh and the Granthi, get Bachan arrested and on the strength of their false evidence he is sentenced to death and hanged. Later Sundari, in revenge, manages to burn Pala Singh and his companions alive in a house and then commits suicide by jumping into a canal.

Nanak Singh seems to have realised after having written *Chitta Lahu* that he had spent too much labour on that portrayal. He had indeed put some pep into the heroine of *Chitta Lahu*, Sundari, and even in the utterly demoralised Gurdei.

But in Sarala of *Fauladi Phul* (1934), he puts more of moral strength. She is, in Nanak Singh's own words, "delicate as a flower but hard as iron".

Sarala, orphaned by the death of her mother, is given in marriage by her father to an old man, Trilok Singh of Lahore. But Sarala is made of sterner stuff than Gurdei or even Sundari. She loves a young man, Mohan, though in accordance with the moral standards of Indian society to which Nanak Singh fully subscribes,

she keeps clear of the temptation of flesh in this love. But to no avail—Trilok Singh's secretary, Jagat Singh, poisons Trilok Singh's mind against her. And one night when he sees Mohan leave Sarala's room after a platonic secret meeting, he beats her unconscious and then thinking that she is dead and afraid of the consequences, takes poison and dies.

Sarala quite naturally is suspected of having killed her aged husband and tried. But at the last moment when the judge is about to pronounce the sentence of death, Jagat Singh rushes in and confesses his having procured the poison which had killed Sarala's mother and the remaining portion of which Trilok Singh had taken himself. Jagat Singh also dies of the same poison. Sarala is acquitted and goes to Kashmir to join Mohan there.

Evidently, Nanak Singh's nerve as a melodramatic tragedian has failed in this novel and he has made it into an unconvincing comedy. He has not let Sarala die, but has made her join her lover in triumph.

Though Sarala does not become a prostitute when she is widowed, as Gurdei had to—of course, because she has a lover to turn to and is not altogether shiftless like Gurdei—still Nanak Singh has succumbed to the temptation of introducing a prostitute in the story, though Gulzar is only an extra character introduced as a proof of Trilok Singh's unfaithfulness to his wives one after another.

In *Kagtan di Beri*, Prem, the son of a rich merchant of Amritsar, gets caught, through the tentacles of a prostitute, Jamuna. When Prem has wasted all his fortune, and there are warrants for his arrest, Gopal Singh and Jamuna, moved by his wife, Shanti's wailings, return all her jewellery to her. But Prem takes it ill and trying to shoot Jamuna misses his aim and the bullet kills Shanti instead. Then he runs away and becomes a sadhu. Gopal Singh and Jamuna in penance start an institute to look after widows and orphans. Prem also turns up to stand at the gate of the institute and to be recognised only after he is dead.

Here also Nanak Singh brings in a prostitute and a villainous friend, but the ending is all so flabbily idealistic that nothing of social purpose gets through.

At this stage other influences begin to work on Nanak Singh who says that after these novels, about half a dozen novels, like *Piar di Duniya* (The World of Love), *Gharib di Duniya* (The World

of the Poor), *Adh Khiria Phul* (The Half-blown Flower), *Tuti Vina* (The Broken Lyre), and *Gangajali Vich Sharab* (Liquor in the Flask of Sacred Water) that he wrote were influenced by various popular movements like the Congress, Socialist Party, Anarchist Party, and the like. One wonders what party in India or in the Punjab, Nanak Singh refers to as the Anarchist Party.

In *Piar di Duniya* all the intriguing characters Prabh Dayal, Sant Onkar Nath, Dr. Nazir Ahmed commit suicide or are hanged, and boards are cleared for the marriages of the true lovers, Sunder Dass and Pushpa, and Pritam Singh and Manorama. In between Pushpa, taking the vow of celibacy and dedication to her native land, joins the terrorist party under the leadership of one Baba Ji. But she is persuaded by Sunder Dass to forswear violence and she tells Baba Ji of her resolve. The Baba Ji would let her withdraw if she would first kill Pritam Singh and Sunder Dass. Pritam Singh is her brother and an honest sub-inspector of police. Pushpa kills the Baba Ji instead, and then foreswears violence.

In this novel, Nanak Singh betrays the influence of Gur Baksh Singh's philosophy of love, but the love that conquers in the end of this complicated story has to wade through rivers of blood.

In *Gharib di Duniya*, the factory-owner, Amar Nath finds himself confronted by his own son, Baldev, who has become a labour leader, and loves Malti, daughter of another labour leader, Shanker. Many people go to jail during a strike in the factory. Hindu-Muslim riots add a further complication. Amar Nath has a hand in these riots. Baldev informs the police and gets him arrested, who after due repentance dies. Baldev inherits the mill and all is well now with Baldev marrying Malti, though Shanker, who is ailing, dies at home after release from jail. Thus in this novel, Nanak Singh again prescribes love as the panacea for all communal, class and personal conflicts.

Adh Khiria Phul and *Pavitar Papi* are stories of ideal love that does not find fruition and the lovers die or are as good as dead. Probably Nanak Singh means to say that in the present economic and social set-up true love cannot flourish, and therefore, this set-up needs changing. But Nanak Singh has no clear-cut outline of a new order.

In his next two novels, *Jiwan Sangram* (Life's Battle) and *Dhundle Parchhaven* (Misty Shadows), Nanak Singh tries in his own amorphous manner to tackle the theme of class oppression. In

Jiwan Sangram the main characters are Dev Raj, a landlord, his plain-looking daughter, Usha, Puran Chand, who has married Usha for her landed property, and Champa, daughter of a servant of Dev Raj's and Usha's companion. Puran Chand and Usha go to Kashmir, Champa accompanying Usha. In Kashmir Puran Chand succeeds in seducing Champa. Parallel to this is Usha's idealistic interest in Banta, the thief, who becomes, through her encouragement, a musician known as Master Balwant. Here again Champa, stricken with remorse, hangs herself. Usha falls to her death down a gorge, but not before she has forgiven her erring husband. The target seems here to be social inequity and the vulnerability of poor and dependent women.

In *Dhundle Parchhaven*, Devinder Singh is a rich factory-owner. He has kept Damodari, the widow of a worker as his mistress. Not content with this he seduces her daughter, Subhadra also. Damodari runs away with Subhadra to extricate herself from Devinder Singh's clutches, but at Delhi she meets her death and Subhadra becomes a prostitute. Nanak Singh's art had too long done without a prostitute, it seems. Subhadra gives birth to a son Kishore who looks like Devinder Singh.

Raminder, Devinder Singh's only daughter, is a doctor employed at Lahore. She comes to Amritsar to look after her ailing mother, and learns from Ratan, the *tongawallah*, who is Damodari's son, of the evil ways her father has fallen into. She takes Ratan to Delhi to try to retrieve Damodari and Subhadra from their miserable plight. But at that end Subhadra, visited by Naubat Rai, learns that he is her father's elder brother who had turned Damodari out of the paternal house. Subhadra stabs Naubat Rai to death, is arrested, tried and hanged.

Raminder brings Kishore back as her brother. Ratan has become literate and wiser. Raminder marries him to Lila, daughter of her servant Panju, and herself vows to remain unmarried all her life, dedicates herself to the service of her people.

In his next novel, *Love Marriage* (One wonders why the story is given an English title), Nanak Singh presents his ideal of true love and marriage. He tells us in the introduction, that the young man of today looks at love marriage from three angles and these he has presented in this story of three marriages, ideal, low and middling. The ideal marriage is that of Inderpal, and Arvind. Reading in a library at Dina Nagar a poem of Arvind's Inderpal falls in love

with her (forgetting Raj Kumari, a distant cousin, whose affection he has won, too) and they become friends. In the meantime Raj Kumari has run away with Raghunath, son of Bhola Nath in whose house her mother Maya is employed as cook's help. Inderpal and Arvind go to Kashmir to rescue Raj Kumari and learn from a letter of Raghunath's that he had taken Raj Kumari to Calcutta where finding herself betrayed she has fallen from the window of a hotel and is on the point of death. She dies but not before she has wished Inderpal and Arvind to get married. This is the ideal marriage.

Tucked on to the story is that of Inderpal's Muslim friend Akhtar, the painter (one or more of Nanak Singh's characters have to be artists, musicians or poets), with a cousin Zulekha. This is the middling kind of love marriage. Evidently the love marriage that Raj Kumari had sought with Raghunath is of the low variety.

Dur Kinara (The Distant Shore) is another sentimental story.

Tuti Vina and *Gangajali Vich Sharab* are two novels with the same characters. Satya, a prostitute (again) gives up her evil profession and marries Ganga Ram. She has already a daughter, Pratima, ten years old, whom she wants to keep out of her evil profession. Pratima grows up to love a Congress worker, Uday Shankar, who is a rich man's son and a doctor in the bargain. (Doctors are not rare, at this stage in Nanak Singh's world). But Uday Shankar does not marry Pratima for being a prostitute's daughter. After many vicissitudes in her life, Pratima also becomes a prostitute and earns a lot of money. Then she also gives up the profession and goes to live at Lyallpur under a false name. There she is able to marry her daughter Sita (Urvashi) to Madan, her tutor, but not before she has been seduced, married and betrayed by Prakash, a rich man.

In his novels written after 1947, Nanak Singh begins to dabble in political philosophy, which is a unique mixture of Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy of non-violence and what may be called popular socialism. But before plunging into that stream, he has to take account of the terrible massacres, mass violence, desecration of temples and women and large-scale forced transfers of populace between western Punjab and Indian Punjab.

This takes the space of two novels, *Khun de Sohile* (Paeans of Blood) and *Agg di Khed* (The Game of Fire). It is the story of Bhana Shah, a money-lender shopkeeper of village Chakri in Attock

district of Pakistan, who has lost all his property and family members, but is able himself to cross over to Indian Punjab—Amritsar—with Nasim, daughter of a Muslim friend of his, as a result of strange circumstances. The families of refugees from West Punjab are encamped in the precincts of the Golden Temple. One among those bringing them provisions and clothes, etc. is Brijinder, who takes Bhane Shah and his daughter Krishna (Nasim) to his house for shelter. He is so aroused by Bhane Shah's tale of woe that actuated by feelings of revenge he joins a group of Hindu-Sikh rioters. Krishna goes along with Brijinder to a meeting of these rioters, and there she describes her reaction in these words: "I am pained to have to say that though the trouble originated with Muslims, who were turned wild by the League propaganda, yet the remedy that is being offered is like washing bloodstains with blood."

In West Pakistan Yusuf is so moved by excesses committed by Muslims against Hindus that he escorts Bhane Shah's daughter-in-law, Rukman, with her jewellery worth about thirty thousand rupees to join Bhane Shah at Amritsar. In the end, one of the Hindu rioters, Sudarshan, shoots down Nasim and Yusuf commits suicide. The story is steeped in idealism throughout. Nanak Singh seeks the cure of all human wickednesses in idealism, not in any revolutionary change in the social order.

In his next novel, *Manjhdhar* (Midstream), Nanak Singh describes the situation of the refugees and the bureaucrats of various levels who were entrusted with the task of rehabilitating them, but who in league with opportunistic elements from the refugees as well as the local population were enriching themselves through bribery, black-marketing and profiteering. In *Manjhdhar* 'the ship of Congress workers and leaders is symbolically caught in mid-stream under the furious waves of sin.' The heroine, Punnya, reforms her seducer, Mansur, turning him into a brother, and her new lover Dr. Anand, an ambitious Congress worker who has been corrupted by the easy gains that he has been able to make in the new situation. The conclusion is again thoroughly idealistic. Indeed, one fails to see any social purpose in Punnya satisfying for once the carnal desire of the helpless Mansur for fear that lack of this satisfaction might prove fatal to him.

In *Chitrakar* (The Painter) Nanak Singh loads the story heavily with comments on the fine arts, social service, sexual morality, the

market economy and individual fortitude in face of all difficulties. Now Nanak Singh's heroines are not the weaklings of his first period whose virtue lay in making them suffer at the hands of their cruel and profligate husbands, to forgive them and in the end to commit suicide. Now they fight against male oppression as well as economic difficulties and come out triumphant in the end. But here again the triumphs are all individual and the social order is left unchanged. The story is that of Prabhakar, a painter, his wife Shyama, son Subhash and daughter Shashi. Prabhakar goes to Bombay in search of artistic achievement and his deserted family has to suffer dire poverty and even moral degradation. But in the end all turns out well. Seth Dwarka Das, who had seduced both Shyama and Shashi is saved from Subhash's revenge in the nick of time by Prabhakar's appearance on the scene, in Dwarka Das's bedroom. In another instance also, Prabhakar proves a saint. He marries Dwarka Das's daughter Kusum who deserted by a lover, is about to commit suicide, to give her an appearance of respectability, but later he turns her over to his own son Subhash for a genuine marriage.

From all this labyrinth of unlikely events, Nanak Singh draws the conclusion that an artist has to be a Mahatma. Now art has been substituted for love and sacrifice as the panacea for all evils.

In *Kati Hoi Patang* (The Stringless Kite) Nanak Singh presents woman as a kite in three shapes, Kamini, Chambeli and Kesari. The implication is that woman is a kite which torn from its string, the husband, must fall on thorns. Kesari is the kite that, broken loose of its string, has to lead the life of a whore. Chambeli, her parents not agreeing to her marriage with Sukhbir falls dangerously ill and contracts tuberculosis, and only then is she allowed to marry Sukhbir and recover her health. Kamini tries to falsify the common implication. Deserting her husband, she becomes a writer and a musician, and then joins films. She earns great wealth and thinks of living an independent life.

In one of their discussions Sukhbir is made to say, "The fact is that as long as eighty to ninety per cent of people do not get enough to eat, all the sophistications, fine living and show of civilisation and culture are not only meaningless but also downright exploitation of man by man." Sukhbir tells her that distributing her wealth among the poor will only make wastrels of them and they will lose their self-respect. "We shall have to change this social

order, in which the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer."

Even the logic that Nanak Singh puts on his character's lips is faulty. (Nanak Singh has only learnt a few cliches and spouts them out one way or another.)

In the end Kamini is persuaded to make up with her husband, Brij Mohan, who has also mended his ways. She now thinks of working for a revolution, living among workers and making revolutionary films depicting their struggle. But Kamini's revolution will not be violent. She is emphatic that the users of bombs and fire and arson are the greatest enemies of the nation. A true revolutionary will not kill even an ant, much less a human being.

Suman Kanta is the story of two friends Suman and Kanta. Ram Prakash, Suman's husband, ill-treats her, learning of which Kanta writes to Suman to face her husband bravely. She says, "Despite your education, intelligence and knowledge of human behaviour, when you fall prostrate without protest against the oppressor, it is beyond my imagination." However, it is Kanta's brother, Prem Prakash, who comes to Suman's rescue. He gets Ram Prakash arrested, and then makes him confess his evil doings and turn over half of his property worth over a lakh and a half to Suman.

Adam Khor is the most ambitious of Nanak Singh's novels. The characters are Thakur Singh, an industrialist of Ludhiana who indulges in all kinds of wrong-doing and profligacy, Shingara Singh, a veteran of the Indian army who has lost a leg in action against Communists in Telangana, his wife, Sulochana, Thakur Singh's wife, Amar Kaur and son Pritpal, Bharati, a Communist fighter of Telangana and Sundar Das, a Gandhi-ite leader. Thakur Singh tries all means to seduce Sulochana, but she stands unshaken as a rock. Pritpal who is her ally against his father's iniquities derives strength from her. Sulochana's steadfastness has redriven Thakur Singh to a confession of all his crimes and as penance he makes over all his property to Pritpal who then marries Sulochana, her husband having died in the course of the story. Sulochana and Pritpal also come in contact with the revolutionary Bharati whom Sundar Das persuades to forsake his policy of violence and subscribe to the Gandhian creed of non-violence.

Nanak Singh's novels after *Adam Khor* are a fall-off—there are about a dozen—with the exception of *Ik Mian Do Talwaran* (One Scabbard Two Swords) in which Nanak Singh has tried to pay his

tribute to the revolutionaries of 1913–1916 called as the Ghaddar Party formed by Punjabi emigrants to the USA and Canada, who returned to India with the aim of driving out the British. They failed miserably but their heroism is indisputable and their leaders like Kartar Singh Sarabha, Baba Visakha Singh, Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna and Baba Gurmukh Singh presented examples of supreme courage and life-long sacrifice. This novel is about the efforts of Kartar Singh Sarabha to instigate the Indian Army units in the Punjab and other places like Meerut for rising against the British. Nanak Singh introduces the proverbial love interest in the story by showing Biri, daughter of Sodhi Sukhdev Singh, scion of a feudal, priestly family, as being drawn into the revolutionary struggle along with her brother, Raghbir Singh, under the influence of his teacher Dalip Singh. Biri falls in love with Kartar Singh and Nanak Singh makes her meet Kartar Singh in his cell of a condemned convict and go through the marriage ceremony. Nanak Singh has given an impressive and historically realistic portrayal of the hypocrisy of the Sikh priestly class in the activities and life of Sodhi Sukhdev Singh. His narration of the heroic deeds of Kartar Singh and Harnam Singh is equally moving. But the induction of a spurious love interest in a historical story does not convince as an artistic motif.

SSS

Sant Singh Sekhon (1908)

Sant Singh Sekhon is regarded as the pioneer of Punjabi fiction of realism, shorn of the temperamental idealism, romanticism and sentimentality that hitherto characterised the bulk of Punjabi fiction. His novel *Lahu Mitti* (Blood and Soil) published in 1948 was hailed as a realistic portrayal of peasant life in Punjab during the first thirty years of the 20th century. As described by Kirpal Singh Kasal, "this novel is the first standard work which narrates the life history of an impoverished peasant family in its proper social and economic environment. This family, reduced from the level of peasant proprietor to that of tenant, struggles to regain its lost dignity. The hero, Vijay Singh, strives to reduce the fort of poverty by sending his son Madan to school and college. Vijay Singh, Daya Kaur and Madan Singh are among other very real characters of bone and flesh, representatives of their class and yet have a distinct seal of individuality... the element of story is rather

loose but the inner tension and differentiation among the characters are admirable indeed."

His second novel *Baba Asman* (Grandfather Sky), 1973, depicts the life story of a young peasant, Sava Singh, born in an ordinary peasant's house in a village of the Ludhiana district. He is impelled by poverty to seek new pastures in Shanghai from where he passes on to the United States. He joins the Ghaddar movement started, more particularly by the Punjabi peasants who had migrated to the Pacific areas of Canada and the USA. Driven by the harsh and racist treatment of their fellow workers in the factories, road and rail building firms and agricultural farms, they form the Indian Association of Pacific Coast under the leadership of men like Jwala Singh, Sohan Singh Bhakna, Kartar Singh Sarabha and Hardial to fight for national independence. The outbreak of World War I in 1914 seems to afford them a unique opportunity when the German embassy and consulate are only too willing to help them.

SSS

Sohan Singh Seetal (b. 1909)

Sohan Singh Seetal entered the field of literary creation after 1947. He has written over a score novels most of which are romantic and sentimental. Among these *Dive di Lo* (The Flame of the Earthen Lamp), *Mul da Mas* (Flesh at a Price) and *Badla* (Revenge) deal with the eternal problem of woman about which most Indian writers and artistes cannot help being sentimental.

Sohan Singh Seetal has in due course travelled from sentimentality, which often becomes macabre, to competent realism, although here also the projection of problems and their solution are not without a sentimental tinge. On the whole, Seetal has described in his novels the countryside of Central Punjab and the life of its people as a kind of parallel to Nanak Singh who deals with urban life in the same tract of land. Both are reformist and sentimental to start with and then grow into realists in their later work but while Nanak Singh tends towards a kind of Gandhian Socialism, Seetal's concern with the peasant's life takes a populist form. His novel *Jug Badal Gya* won the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1974.

SSS

Kartar Singh Duggal (b. 1917)

Primarily a short story writer, Kartar Singh Duggal has also written a number of novels. It is felt that every chapter of his novels tends to become a complete short story in itself. He shares this with a number of other fiction writers who practise both novel and short story writing. This tendency was more prominent in his earlier novels like *Andran* (Intestines) and *Nahun te Mas* (Nails and Flesh).

One of Duggal's most important novels is *Andran* (1948). It is what is known as an *anchalik* (topographical) novel relating to life in Pothoar, mainly Rawalpindi district, that now forms part of West Punjab. *Maila Anchal* of Renu in Hindi came much later. The novel attempts to recreate Pothoari land and people which have a peculiar flavour and character of their own. On its publication in 1948 the novel was particularly hailed for its Pothoari dialect, maybe because it brought nostalgic memories to the refugees from that part of the sub-continent on account of the Partition.

It was followed by *Nahun te Mas* (1950) (Nails and Flesh) a story of Muslim-Sikh amity laid in the strife-torn period of the Partition of the country on the eve of Independence. Later on this novel was merged into the second volume entitled *Ma Pio Jaye* (Born of the Same Parents) of Duggal's trilogy relating to the Punjab.

The other two constituents of this trilogy are *Hal Muridan Da* (The Plight of the Devotees) and *Jal ki Pyas Na Jaye* (Water Remains Thirsty). *Hal Muridan Da* relates to conditions in the Punjab after World War I with the British rule tightening its grip but at the same time inspiring the nationalist forces to give determined fight for freedom. The novel ends with the Britishers relenting but deciding to divide the country with the creation of Pakistan. The Hindus and Muslims who lived amicably all these years are estranged. Neighbours and friends who would sacrifice their lives for each other are torn apart.

Ma Pio Jaye, the second volume in the trilogy, tells the story of refugees and their rehabilitation culminating in the liberation of Bangladesh when a lie is given to the two-nation theory of the advocates of Pakistan.

The last part of the trilogy *Jal ki Pyas Na Jaye* is an attempt at depicting the new India with waves of foreign forces influencing

it. It tells the story of the Emergency clamped by Indira Gandhi and how the people voted her out of power as a punishment and then having been disillusioned with the alternative, voted her back to power in a sweep, as it were.

Before launching his next trilogy *Nanak Nam Chardi Kala, Tere Bhane, Sarbat ka Bhala*, Duggal wrote a number of novels. *Sharad Punian di Raat* (The Night of the Full Moon) is based upon the author's well-known short story "Chanani Raat da Ik Dukhant". It is the story of a mother who spells disaster for her daughter on account of her own doings. The Biblical adage—'The sins of the fathers are visited upon the children' –constitutes the main theme of this novel.

Man Pardesi (Alienated Heart) is the story of the agony of the Muslims in India divided after the Partition and because of which even their loyalties are suspect.

Phulan da Saath (Companionship of Flowers) is a tender love story marred by the agitation for Khalistan in the Punjab.

Duggal's latest novels are *Nanak Nam Chardi Kala* (Blessed Are Those who Remember God), *Tere Bhane* (As willed by You) and *Sarbat Ka Bhala* (Good of All). In the new trilogy Duggal proposes to tell the story of the Sikhs in search of their identity from Guru Nanak's time to the present day. The first volume covers the period up to the fourth Sikh Guru, Guru Ram Das. The second volume carries the story up to Guru Tegh Bahadur. And the thired volume is devoted to Guru Gobind Singh.

KSD

Surinder Singh Narula (b. 1917)

In *Jag Biti* (The Outer Story) and *Sil Aluni* (The Saltless Rock) Surinder Singh Narula has carried the story of his people further from its version in *Pio Puttar* in which he succeeds in portraying the changes of scene in Amritsar with admirable realism. The story in *Pio Puttar* starts with the childhood of Hira, who is the fictional representative of the author's father, and takes in its embrace as it proceeds the full economic and social life of the town of Amritsar in the first two decades of the 20th century, the easy going administrative structure, the new railway joining Amritsar with Lahore, etc. There are mysterious echoes of the Ghaddar Movement which is the cause of the disappearance of Hira's father from his home forever.

In *Rang Mahal* (The Pleasure Palace), 1950, Narula has taken the story of a middle-class family of Amritsar whose head Manak Singh is a retired Deputy Collector. He has four daughters and a son. His wife is a bundle of nerves even more than her husband and the four daughters, bearing significantly names that rhyme with one another, show a monotonous sameness in their lives. The coming into that sickly home of Jagjit Singh, son of a friend of Manak Singh, belonging to a village brings tenuous expectations of romance. Jagjit Singh who is a student of Khalsa College, Amritsar, wavers between the three eldest daughters and then decides to marry the second one. An extraneous element of labour activity is introduced through Helen, daughter of a soldier of the Salvation Army, whom Jagjit Singh meets in a cinema hall. Helen's mother tells Jagjit that Helen is a natural daughter of Manak Singh. She has found a book entitled *The Second World War and Our Duty*. Helen becomes a nurse in the army and Jagjit Singh also joins the army as Junior Commissioned Officer under the influence of this book in which the World War, after the Soviet Union's entry into it, is proclaimed as a People's War.

In *Din Duniya* (The Spiritual and the Temporal) Narula describes the commercial and industrial as well as social and communal life of the city of Lahore on the eve of Independence and the havoc wrought by the large-scale violence, killings and migrations of people during the Partition. In *Dil Darya* (The Ocean of the Heart) is described a similar situation of the Partition days in Delhi in which the activities of persons belonging to different political persuasions add to the confusion and Narula advocates in the person of Jasbir Kaur a kind of democratic Gandhian socialism. The main characters in the novel are Prem Verman, a painter and Kamini Devi, wife of a barrister, Ravi Shanker, who is an admirer of Prem Verma's art. She also expresses her love for Verma who however refuses to be drawn in. Narula also disapproves of the activities of the Jan Sangh which is in league with some feudal princes and wants to accentuate the confusion. This Gandhian socialism is also the resultant theme of *Lok Dushman* (Enemy of the People), which portrays the tenant struggle against landlords in the PEPSU region of those days, spiced with romance between Daler Kaur, the daughter of Jassa Singh, an elderly peasant leader and Khush Bakhat Singh, a young Communist. But Khush Bakhat Singh does not agree to keeping the struggle non-violent.

He is caught in the reserve of Naraingarh and sentenced for life. Malkiat Singh, a retired armyman, organizes, at the instance of the landlord, a rival committee to cultivate a part of the landlord's estate that had been lying barren. The elderly Jassa Singh resigns and his place is taken by a young man Nahar Singh, who leads the tenants' movement to a successful end. Meanwhile Khushal Singh, brother of the landlord, Gopal Singh, starts a poultry farm, a sheep-farm and piggery on his barren land, thus demonstrating that some other ways were also open to the tenants and finally he organises co-operative cultivation in which many tenants become his partners. The novelist does not develop the story of love between Daler Kaur and Khush Bakhat Singh to any conclusion. *Nili Bar* (Name of the land between the Sutlej and the Ravi that is the districts of Montgomery and Multan), rechristened as *Apne Paraye* (Friends and Strangers) relates the settlement of the canal colony of Sargodha in which process the aboriginal people of that area are displaced by new settlers from the neighbouring districts. A young woman and her lover, members of the aboriginal tribes, struggle for their shares in the settlement and aided by a Christian missionary meet with some success. His latest novels, *Rahe Kurahe* (Off the Track) and *Ratin Hoiyan Vadiyan*, perhaps mark a decline in his art. In the first he has described the workings of Naxalite revolutionaries in some villages which he obviously considers to have gone off the track.

SSS

Amrita Pritam (b. 1919)

Amrita Pritam, eminent as a poet, has written numerous novels also. Her first novel *Jai Shri*, a slim volume deals with a young girl Jai Shri after rejecting many young men who offer conventional marriage, marries Sureshar, whom she finds to be a sincere lover.

Doctor Dev develops the theme of which Amrita Pritam is rather too fond, that a woman can give her body to her husband while in her heart she loves another man.

Pinjar (Skeleton) is the story of Puro, who is abducted by a Muslim boy Rashid. Puro's parents refuse to recover Puro from Rashid as a defiled woman. Puro is thus obliged to live with Rashid and bears him a son. After the disturbances of 1947, Puro witnesses many young Hindu girls being abducted. One of them she recovers

with the help of Rashid and sends her to the security of an evacuee camp of Hindus and Sikhs. Rashid and Puro also find out Lajo, sister of Ram Chand, to whom Puro was betrothed when she was abducted by Rashid. When Ram Chand returns with an army truck to recover his sister, Puro and Rashid give Lajo back to him. Puro's brother has also come with Ram Chand, he asks Puro also to go with him but Puro refuses.

Alhna (The Nest) 1952 is another such story of good people becoming victims of violence and misery.

SSS

Amrita Pritam is a sensitive writer who has highlighted the problems of Indian womanhood both in her poetry and fiction. One may not always agree with her solutions but there can be no doubt about her sincerity of purpose. Her poetic expression lends charm to her prose writing. She knows the craft of weaving a plot and creating motivated characters. *Yaatri* 1971 and *Tehrvan Sooraj* 1978 are her two other important works of fiction.

KSD

Jaswant Singh Kanwal (b. 1919)

Jaswant Singh Kanwal is a lineal successor to Nanak Singh in as much as his novels are romantic and reformist though the two strains are deeper than in Nanak Singh's work. His field of concern is the rural Sikh population, whereas Nanak Singh's field is almost entirely limited to the urban part in which Hindu and Sikh are parts of the same society. Jaswant Singh's first novel *Such nu Phansi* (Truth on the Gallows), 1945 is a romantic story, tragic in the way of Romeo and Juliet in that love between Kanwar Dalip is received with hostility by the girl's brother, Sarwan, resulting in violence and even murder and the hero has to ascend the gallows.

The second novel, *Pali*, 1946 named after its heroine, is a more substantial work. Pali, a high school student belonging to the village of Ajitwal, is married to a military officer of a neighbouring village, Kokri, who soon after the marriage retires from service. Besides the difference of age between Pali and her husband, there is more serious disparity of the ethos of the two families. Pali falls in love with a young man of another village after a chance meeting at the railway station. The story thereafter takes a sensitively romantic turn which is given a beautiful portrayal. As a result Pali leaves her husband's home to take up a military nurse's post

somewhere on the eastern front where she dies in a bomb attack. The narration is abundantly interspersed with Khalil Gibran's realistic comments on life.

The third novel *Puranmashi* (Night of the Full Moon) is a further improvement in style as well as in content. It is the story of a young village maid Ambo who is loved by Rup, prince charming of a neighbouring village. Rup is, however, already married and cannot be united with Ambo, who is soon married to another young man. But the lovers are still united in spirit so that when Ambo is blessed with a daughter and Rup with a son, the respective parents of the two pledge them to each other thus the unsuccessful romance of the parents finds fruition in the marriage of their children.

Rupdhara (The Stream of Beauty), 1959 is the story of a good-looking peasant girl brought up by her father's sister who puts her in a school from which she passes to become a primary school teacher in a village. By that time she is stricken with a romantic sentiment for a young hockey player, Kesar, and the wise aunt marries her to him. Her husband goes away to Singapore to find a job there and thus leaves her alone. Some village scoundrels set themselves after her, but she is saved from their designs by the integrity of the village Sarpanch and her own moral courage. After a few years her husband returns to her to put an end to her tribulations.

Another novel with the same romantic strain and good awareness of social reality is *Hani* (Playmate), 1961 in which the difficulties of pre-marital love in Indian society are portrayed. In the end, the water-drawer girl finds a lover husband of her own caste, but the girl of the scheduled caste loved by a peasant youth is jilted. Romance gives place to social reality in the form of compulsions of caste.

Rat Baki Hai (The Night has not yet passed), 1954 is written in the context of the struggle of occupancy tenants against the landlord in one of the erstwhile states of PEPSU (PEPSU was Punjab and East Punjab States Union) between the years 1947 and 1951. Charan, the son of a peasant and Pal the son of a landlord were close friends. Charan falls in love with Raj, a daughter of Pal's village. But Raj is married to Pal who has deserted his first wife Swarn.

Charan is married to Amro, daughter of Baba Karam Singh, an

old worker in the national struggle. Shortly after his marriage, Charan joins the peasant movement. The steward of the landlord Jaigopal is killed by someone and the landlord manages to get Charan accused of this murder. But Charan goes underground.

Kanwal happens to mix romance with revolutionary activities which ill befit each other.

In *Civil Lines* (1956) the author has changed the scenario from a rural to an urban area. It is the story of village people shifting to town after gaining comparative prosperity through military service. Darshan and Prakash are daughter and son of two retired military officers, respectively.

Darshan loved music over her studies and sometimes gave Radio programmes where she comes in contact with Bahal, a sub-inspector of police, who tricks her to go with him to Bombay to get her songs recorded by a recording company and later seduces her. Darshan becomes pregnant and wants to marry Bahal. But Bahal is already married and the father of a daughter. He evades marriage with Darshan and advises her to undergo an abortion. When Darshan goes to a nurse for this purpose, she gets to know of Bahal's villainy. After an unsuccessful attempt to shoot Bahal, she resolves to kill herself. Before doing so, however, she goes to see Prakash who sympathetically dissuades her from doing so and offers to marry her.

His other three novels *Bhavani, Mittar Pyare Nu* (To a Dear Friend) and *Tawarikh Vekhadi Hai* (The History is Witness) are written in a similar vein.

Jera (Tolerance) 1968 is a novelette entirely different from Kanwal's other novels. It is the story of a girl Harinder who is married to Gurvind. Gurvind happens to be impotent and Harinder is extremely beautiful; so she wants to transfer her affections to her younger brother-in-law, Gurjinder. Gurvind comes to know of it. He thinks of killing his brother and also his wife but knowing that both of them are innocent, he decides to live with the situation, which fact the novelist lauds as broad-minded tolerance.

SSS

Narinder Pal Singh (b. 1923)

Narinder Pal Singh started with some romantic novels like *Malah* (Sailor), *Senapati* (Commander), and *Vih Varhe Bad* (After Twenty

Years). The first relates the story of a young man who is obliged by circumstances to leave his home and pass many years of his life on the bank of a river, working as a sailor, because he was wrongly suspected of having committed a murder. It is immature work—as many first attempts of writers often are. The other two are similarly romantic accounts of the leaders of two Rajput states of medieval times.

Thereafter he began to handle socio-political themes as in *Ik Rah Ik Parau* (One Way and One Stage), and *Aman de Rah* (The Paths of Peace). In the former, the hero is a student of the Dyal Singh College in Lahore, who takes interest in politics and even joins the Communist Party. But he is soon disillusioned with politics and resumes his non-political career of an educated young man. *Aman de Rah* relates the story of a family who had to leave Burma, where they had been settled for many years in 1942 when the Japanese came to occupy Burma for some years. The family succeeds after many travails in reaching Lyallpur where they settle down as peaceful traders. The novelist seems to say that going to settle in foreign countries has ambition and greed as its motivations, whereas pursuing a family career in one's own country is the path of peace.

Narinder Pal Singh first registered his success as a novelist with *Shakti* (Power), in which woman is shown to be the real power in a family's career and fortunes. Sarasvati is orphaned losing her mother at the age of ten and her father marries for the second time. Sarasvati is subjected to ill-treatment by her step-mother which is quite common in Indian society. She comes through the ordeal with great credit as a daughter and receives her reward in the shape of a happy marriage. She rules the roast in her home for many years, as she well deserved until her husband dies and she has to go to live with her son and daughter-in-law at Delhi. But she becomes the same kind of autocratic mother-in-law as her step-mother was to her before. In the end, she has to leave her son's home to live alone, a lonely and disappointed old woman.

Thereafter Narinder Pal Singh writes four historical novels, *Khannio Tikhi* (Sharper than the Sword), *Valon Nikki* (Finer than a Hair), *Eti Marga Jana* (This is the Way to Go) and *Ik Sarkar Bajhon* (Without a Sovereign). The first three of these titles are taken from a line of Guru Amar Das's long poem "Anand". Whereas Guru Amar Das makes these words denote the path of a devoted Sikh,

obviously a difficult path, Narinder Pal Singh narrates in these three novels the long sanguinary struggle that the Sikhs had to wage against the Mughal Empire for three generations, from Banda Bahadur, through the Sikh Misls to the establishment of Ranjit Singh's Kingdom. The fourth, *Ik Sarkar Bajhon* (Without a Sovereign), deals with the time of Anglo-Sikh Wars in which the Sikhs not only lacked a leader like Ranjit Singh but also on the other hand commanded by traitorous generals lose the Punjabi kingdom to the British. The phrase is taken out of the well-known poem of Shah Mohammad relating events that took place in Punjab after the death of Ranjit Singh, leading to the first Anglo-Sikh War of A.D. 1846.

The heroes of these four novels are four generations of a fictional Sikh family, representatives of their times. Narinder Pal Singh has subsequently published these four novels in a single volume under the title, *Sir Dijai Kan Na Kijai* (Facing Death in Battle without Fear).

The history narrated in these novels is the same as current among Sikhs generally in which the destruction of the Sikh Kingdom is attributed to the machinations and treachery of the Dogra ministers and Purbia generals of the time of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, entirely keeping out of account the self-destructive rivalries of the Jat Sikh Sardars, especially the Sandhawalias who were collaterals of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, of whom Ajit Singh was one who assassinated Maharaja Sher Singh. The story of the novel is not primarily the story of Banda Bahadur's rebellion against the Mughal Emperor, Sardar Charat Singh's heroic part in fighting against the Mughal governor and the Afghan invader Ahmed Shah Abdali. It is a parallel story of a fictional family of the Mahl Jat Sikhs, whose members participate in the struggle with great credit up to the time of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, but are torn into factional feuds after the British conquest and fight and enter into litigation over the family estates (Jagirs). Thus in the story of four generations of the Mahl family, the novel describes the life of the four generations of the people of Punjab, especially the Sikhs up to the end of the 19th century.

The third period of his fiction-writing is what may be called the period of experimental novels. The mode of narrative of *Punia ke Massia* (Night of the Full Moon or of Darkness) is what is generally called the stream of consciousness narration.

The next novel, *Chanan Khara Kinara* (The Edge of Light), takes its characters from the old princely family of a state in South India. Raja Jai Dev of the state of Sipla has a beautiful and talented daughter, Rup Mati. She is the ninth daughter of the Raja born of his third wife Satya. The Raj Kumar of Mandila falls in love with Rup Mati but his father does not agree to their marriage because Raja Jai Dev has a bad reputation like most Indian princes. At this the Raj Kumar of Mandila commits suicide. Rup Mati is married to another prince Dharmendra, who also bears a bad reputation. Rup Mati has two children, a daughter and a son from Dharmendra after which Dharmendra dies. At this stage Rup Mati meets an American Louis Carey, manager of a firm at a party in Hyderabad. The two fall in love and cast backward glances on their earlier loves. In this way the writer affords an account of the earlier lives of the two and the influences they had come under. In this narration figure the ideas of Walt Whitman, Doctor Radhakrishnan, Plato, Emerson, T.S. Eliot and the *Upanishads*, all more or less idealistic. Another direction of this experiment is that of showing the birth of love between two individuals belonging to different races and societies.

In the shape of the next novel *Tapu* (Island), Narinder Pal Singh claims to present an anti-novel. The hero Gurmohan who lacks all the qualities of a traditional hero has been brought up with great expectation by his grandmother and a holy man Gurdit Singh. As Gurmohan grows up into an indolent youth, his friends rag him for being effeminate, take him to women of ill-repute to test his potency in which test Gurmohan fails badly. After matriculation Gurmohan is married to a beautiful girl Prito and becomes the father of three sons. But his friends think that the children are by Gurmohan's different friends. Gurmohan finds it difficult to live in this atmosphere and his wife Prito manages to send him to a friend in Delhi where he becomes a stenographer in an international firm. Gurmohan cannot stay long with that firm because Stella, the wife of the director of the firm, succeeds in seducing him. The director comes upon them when they are in bed, and Gurmohan has to leave his job and return home. The usual charges of being impotent continue to be levelled against him in the village, but he shows no reaction and lives as an island in the sea around him.

In his next novel *Vikendrit* (Eccentric), the writer has not given

a name to the central character, who lives in the posh Defence Colony of New Delhi. He is a refugee from Pakistan. After they have had three children, his wife leaves him to live with her parents. Left alone he tries to contract sexual relations with different women but does not go the whole hog with anyone. As an artiste he receives an invitation from Paris, which achievement gives him partial satisfaction. Altogether he lives an isolated life.

The next novel, *Ba Mulahaza Hoshiar* (Prepare Yourself for the Royal Visit), received the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1979. The novel purports to show the funeral procession of modern Western civilization. The scene begins with a heavy snowfall on the aerodrome at New York which has been cut off from the outside world for three days. During these three days all kinds of immoral and vicious things happen and are shown in close-ups as in a film. A good Punjabi young man, Avtar, is caught up in this whirlpool of vice and corruption, unable to stand which he commits suicide. His American beloved who was awaiting him, finding him dead visits India, thinking that the Indian people have a high sense of morality. But in India she is disappointed to find groups of people looking at her with greedy eyes. The author makes use of fantasy in which he sees the Western world afflicted with a nervous twitch which distorts the patient's face. The author shows that there is an area in the central part of India of which the vegetation and climate provide a cure. Symbolically he shows Indian civilisation to provide a cure for this disease. But the sexual hunger lying dormant under the much-vaunted morality of the Indian people is also disappointing.

In *Kal Akal* (Time and Eternity), 1984, the hero is a young Indian who meets with success in whatever he engages himself in posh diplomatic service, service in industry or commerce or in love. The story is basically the author's own, on a much exaggerated scale. *Sutradhar* (Director), 1985 presents a similar success story.

Narinder Pal Singh displays a wide-ranging imagination but betrays a pragmatic outlook and lack of style and finesse.

SSS

Narinjan Tasnim (b. 1929)

Narinjan Tasnim has depicted the reality of urban life in Punjab without any ideological overtones. He is neither romantic nor cynical about this life. His characters are members of the lower

middle class, who have escaped being caught in the vicious circle of industrial life. Their life has, however, its own frustrations and disappointments, though these never grow into a tragedy. On the other hand, their rather futile attempts to overcome their problems occasion a sensitive humour. Their problems are the product of their sexual involvements and temptations. The reader wonders in a kind of superior way why these people are caught up in these cobwebs. In *Parchhaven* (Shadows), 1966, Jasbir is travelling in a train accompanied by her husband and four-year-old son. An earlier lover of hers is also travelling in the same compartment. Both recognise each other and, without speaking to each other, revolve in their minds the old intimacies and complaints, and are stricken with a subtle feeling of frustration.

The subject matter of *Kasak* (Pangs) is similar as the author himself admits: their desire to enjoy the pleasures of life that they have missed. He wishes to bring about harmony between their physical and mental states. Of course, this is not exclusively a problem of middle class life but also that of the common man.

Treran te Rup (Fissures) is, of course, a narrative of fissures in the form and shape of man's life. All of us experience these fissures, physical or mental, and Kanta the heroine of this novel is also such a person and is faced with dissatisfaction and disharmony.

In *Hanera Hon Tak* (Till Dusk) the novelist has made use of a very interesting device. The hero, Narinder, has had a poverty-stricken childhood in which he got little affection from anybody, but when through his own enterprise he rises to a high material level he gets opportunities of sexual gratification from many sides. Even so his condition remains that of one who has not received enough. The novelist does not carry this account to the point of tragedy, as the greatest among earlier writers were prone to do.

Ik Hor Nava Sal (One More New Year) is an experimental work which is quite successful. On the new year's day, a rickshaw-puller revives imperceptibly in his imagination the memories of the past which become a part of the present. And then he begins to imagine the future of a son which also becomes for the while a part of the present for him. A backward look at the past and imagined future completes the life of the hero, Banta.

In his next novel, *Jadon Saver Hoi* (When the Sun Rose), Tasnim has shown the fraternity of Hindu, Sikh and Muslim in Amritsar being destroyed in the holocaust of 1947. In it the tragedy of a

tender relationship between a Muslim girl Salma and a Sikh youth of the neighbourhood Biri, which has been destroyed, a relation that could prove the beginning of a new life in our country, if we in Punjab had not been split into two parts by the tragic events of that year.

In his latest novel *Yugan to Par* (Beyond the Centuries), 1983, the novelist has presented the tragedy of an artist taken from real life. He has tried in his imagination to draw a parallel between this artist and the great poet Homer, of ancient Greece. It is of course a futile attempt and thanks be that it is only an exception.

SSS

Mohan Kahlon (b. 1933)

Mohan Kahlon came into the field of novel with much promise which he has failed to fulfil. The scene of his first two novels, *Machhli ik Darya Di* (A River Fish) and *Beri te Bareta* (The Boat and the Shoal) is the country beyond the Ravi, a part of the Gurdaspur district which has fallen to the share of Pakistan. The first is the story of a Sikh Jat girl Ratani who is betrothed to a young man of a neighbouring village to whom she gives herself when he stealthily comes to her father's house after her father has revoked the betrothal and promised her to a retired militarist. Her father is a poor peasant who is an opium-addict in the bargain. She has also been raped by a Muslim field labourer in her father's fields. Ratani is grossly dissatisfied with her elderly husband and contracts an illicit liaison with her husband's elder brother's son, Tara. When her husband dies after a couple of years, his elder brother makes her his wife according to the Sikh Jat custom, but much against her will. Knowing of Ratani's relations with Tara, his own son, he encourages him to indulge in smuggling activities and betrays him to be killed by the border police. The novel shows the author's grip on the pathetic reality that is smuggling and provides idyllic descriptions of nature in that remote region at the base of the Sivaliks. The other novel tells the story of the life of the Gujjar and Malah tribes in the same region in which the hero Kadir, himself an illegitimate son, takes his revenge on the daughters and wives of his tribe and also the Brahmin widow of a priest in the neighbourhood, who has too much money to let her remain unscathed by the social evils of such a life. Here also the novelist's strong points are descriptions of the natural scenes on the river

bank and the amoral life of a tribe cut off from the civilization of the plains. *Pardesi Rukh* (The Foreign Tree) is the pathetic story of a Muslim young woman, who falls into the hands of a batch of Indian policemen when her family is killed in the intercommunal slaughters and is raped and molested by a number of people, till she comes to the safety of a young Sikh villager where she finds emotional fulfilment, but only for a short while. For she is taken away to Pakistan as a recovered woman after some neighbours have informed the authorities. *Gori Nadi da Geet* (The Song of a Crystal Stream) relates with much gusto and even rather profanely the sexual relations between a young poet and a young woman in a colony of writers and artists.

SSS

Gurdial Singh (b. 1933)

Gurdial Singh has emerged as a successful novelist in both form and content during the past two decades. With *Marhi da Diva* (The Earthen Lamp on the Memorial Stone 1962) he makes his debut as a novelist. In this story he has depicted the contrasting relations between master and servant belonging to two generations. Dharam Singh treats his agricultural servant, Gohla, with great consideration so much so that when Gohla dies he allows his son Jagsir to cremate his father on a bit of his land and raise a memorial stone over it. But Dharam Singh's son Bhanta treats Jagsir very cruelly. He even demolishes Gohla's memorial stone and brings that bit of land under cultivation. Stoically whereas Dharam Singh finds himself helpless against his son's brutality, Jagsir is also shown in love with a barber's wife Bhano, but even in this he does not seek fulfilment. The story is however too sentimental and weak.

In *Anhoe* (The Non-living) the writer depicts the life and struggles of a carpenter, Bishna, who vehemently resists Governmental pressures to acquire his small piece of land to build a shopping complex but ultimately he has to succumb. Not losing heart he goes away to a village with his wife and undergoes severe hardships. But he bears the blows of the world like a Titan. This is perhaps Gurdial Singh's masterpiece, for here the characters are his own kith and kin, strongly individualistic artisans, one of whom, Bishna, cannot adjust himself to the changing conditions which have on the other hand proved so beneficial to his class. In *Kuvela* (The Past Hour), the heroine, a widow belonging to Brahmin

caste, tries to lead the life of a social worker, but in spite of the help of her brother who is a doctor, fails to find a true vocation. Ultimately she falls in love with a young man but then it is too late. In *Rete di Muthi* (A Handful of Sand), a young man goes to take up a teacher's job somewhere in Himachal Pradesh, leaving behind his wife to fend for herself and their child. Gurdial Singh has attempted to show in this hardship how the poor are sometimes compelled to expose their dependants to economic hardships and moral hazards when they have to go out in search of their livelihood. *Adh Chanani Rat* (Night of the Half-Moon) describes peasant life in Bhatinda where land and women are the chief bones of contention among men resulting in violence, murder and hanging. This novel won the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1977. *Athan Uggan* (Sunset and Sunrise) describes peasant life in the same region with a slight variation in that the unruly and violent ways of the majority of the peasants are sharply contrasted with the civility and gentleness of a retired subedar, Dasaundha Singh and his educated son.

Anne Ghore da Dan (The Blind House Sought as Alms) describes the wretched life of scheduled caste agricultural labourers. One young man among them leaves his home for the city where he becomes a rickshaw-puller to find life even more miserable, while another boy runs away from the village with a girl of the same caste but finding life difficult, comes back to the village to claim his paltry share of livestock, a black bullock and a cart which he brings back to his new place of work.

SSS

Harnam Dass Sahrai(b. 1920)

Harnam Dass Sahrai has written many historical novels. His *Lohgarh* narrates the story of Banda Bahadur who was living as an ascetic under the name of Madho Dass till he became a disciple of Guru Gobind Singh and returned to Punjab with a group of Guru Gobind Singh's disciples who had followed the Guru on his southward journey. Among Banda Bahadur's companions is Satnami Sadhu Rajguru who has accepted the Sikh faith. Two other characters are Reddy, son of a rich landlord turned sadhu and Hiravati who falls in love with Reddy and marries him. These two also come to the Punjab to serve as Banda Bahadur's messengers to the various Sikh centres. Strengthened with such

reinforcements, Banda Bahadur reduces the country from Ambala to Sarhind, defeating the Nawab of Sarhind and becomes master of the province. Bahadur Shah returns from the Deccan to retrieve the country occupied by Banda, who gets besieged at Lohgarh; leaving Rajguru there, he then escapes to a safer region in the Sivaliks. Rajguru sets the besieged fort on fire in which he is himself consumed. Another novel is *Sabhravan*, in which the Sikhs were finally defeated in the first Anglo-Sikh War. *Anup Kaur* is the story of a Sikh girl who goes to Hari Singh Nalva on an important mission to the fort of Jamraud where the Sikhs are besieged by the Afghans. The Sikhs repel the Afghans though Hari Singh Nalva and Anup Kaur are both killed in action. *Haria Ragle* takes its name from the phrase with which Pakhtun mothers used to frighten their children. It means 'Haria (Hari Singh) will come.'

Pathik (Wayfarer) written in the first person is the writer's description of a railway journey from Jalandhar to Calcutta, in the course of which he meets a woman by the name of Shamli, who is in reality a prostitute, Shamshad Begum. There are some other characters also who have failed in love. *Gali Muhalle de Lok* (People of the Neighbourhood), *Dachi* (Dromedary) and *Tevivan Chand* (Thirty-third Moon) are some of Sahrai's other novels in which a strong dose of romanticism is mixed with a description of contemporary reality.

SSS

Surjit Singh Sethi (b. 1928)

Surjit Singh Sethi is a writer of what may be called the experimental school. His first short novel *Janta Jagi* (The People Awaken) is a rather immature attempt. It is the story of the varying love relations of Ramesh, Ranbir, Manohar and Urmila and Ramesh's brother Rajan and his wife Champa who has become a prostitute after being driven out of her father-in-law's house when her husband Rajan is mistakenly believed to have died. After many permutations and combinations, misunderstandings and realisations, Urmila is mistakenly given an injection of poison and dies. Her husband Manohar is accused by Ranbir of killing Urmila. He is imprisoned for seven years. After acquittal Manohar goes to kill Ranbir but is himself killed with the bullet with which he wanted to put an end to Ranbir, who is then sentenced to death and hanged. Sethi has called this novel *The People Wake up* because Ranbir and Rajan are

freedom-fighters. But the web of complications of love and enmity that he weaves makes a mess of everything.

In *Ik Shahir di Gal* (The Tale of a City), Ratan is a writer and journalist and Hardev a medical practitioner without the necessary certificate. Hardev has opened a chemist's shop but actually he lives on prostitutes like Shanti and Kusum. In the end Shanti and Hardev receive adequate punishment for their misdeeds, Shanti by Hardev's pistol and Hardev by being imprisoned for it.

In *Rait da Pahar* (A Mountain of Sand, 1954) Raj a dancing girl marries a rich man, Seth Chaman Lal. Then to acquire his wealth she gets him drowned in the river. She falls in love with her step-brother Ashok, who loves another girl of ill-fame Nira. Nira gets Raj thrown into the sea for which she is tried and imprisoned. Later, after completing her sentence, Nira comes back to Ashok and lives with him as a dutiful wife.

Khali Piala (The Empty Cup 1961) is a story narrated in the stream-of-consciousness style. Roma, a sixteen-year-old college student, loves Vijay Singh, her cousin, but runs away with Shinda, whom she finds to be like the English film actor Montogomery Clift. Shinda deserts her and she marries his friend Rajan, a writer, but soon parts company with him too. Abbot, another friend of Rajan and son of rich parents invites Roma to live with him, but Roma cannot decide whether Abbot wants her to be his wife or sister.

SSS

Dalip Kaur Tiwana (b. 1935)

Dalip Kaur Tiwana is the counterpart of the poetess Amrita Pritam in Punjabi letters. What Amrita Pritam says in verse, Dr Tiwana depicts eminently in fiction, as much in short stories as in novels. Both are given to talking about the plight of the weaker sex in the man-made society around us. The only difference is that while Amrita Pritam's milieu is mainly urban, at times even universal, Dalip Tiwana is rooted in the soil, her own tradition and folklore, economic exploitation of and the social curbs inflicted upon the other sex in society in the Punjab.

Author of 17 novels to date with 2 Mss awaiting publication, Dalip Tiwana is also a leading short story writer with over 100 stories to her credit published in a number of volumes besides her autobiography done in four parts of which the first part *Nange*

Pairan da Safar (Barefoot Journey) has been published in translation in English and Hindi.

Dr Tiwana won the coveted Sahitya Akademi Award with her second novel *Eh Hamara Jeevna* (This My Life). And she doesn't seem to have looked back ever since. She has been regaling her readers with volume after volume; a constant flow of creativity.

A University professor, having served as chairperson of the School of Punjabi Studies for several years, Dr Tiwana combines erudite scholarship with a facile pen; a simple, unsophisticated, transparent person, steering clear of the lime-light and unwarranted controversy, literary or otherwise.

With her doctorate on the Technique and Development of the Short Story in Punjabi, her grip over the genre is undoubtedly firm. As it is, the practitioners of fiction who write both novels and short stories are generally charged with making every chapter of the novel complete in itself, so that it reads like a short story; on the other hand Dalip Tiwana's novels are so tightly constructed that they appear to be long short stories.

This is most true of her latest works: *Lang Gae Darya* (The Rivers Crossed) and *Zimin Puchhe Asman* (The Earth Asks the Sky) published one after the other with a gap of a few months.

I have always believed that it is not only the thought and beliefs of a writer that find expression in his or her writing, the person of the writer is also reflected in what comes out of his or her pen. This is exemplified in Dr Tiwana's work. Quiet and serene, gentle and suave, the reader can see Dalip's image in her writing. Emerging out of her preoccupation with trials and tribulations of the Punjabi womanhood, the author has of late involved herself in two most compelling themes of the life in the Punjab today, more particularly the Malwa region to which she belongs.

Lang Gae Darya portrays the decadent society in the erstwhile princely state of Patiala. 'Those who draw from life,' says Dr Tiwana, 'more than what they give, life demands from their children more than what they get.' Belonging to the class which had easy access to royalty, the author recreates vivid pictures of the time under the rule of the legendary Maharaja Bhupinder Singh:

The river is in flood. There is imminent danger to the capital. The Maharaja is advised to propitiate the deity. With a tray full of gold bangles and a nose-ring his Highness plunges into the roaring river in person. The surging waters are knee-deep, then

waist deep, then up to the neck when all of a sudden a wave jumps and as if snatches the tray away from the hands of the Maharaja. Lo and behold, a miracle takes place. The water starts receding!

The performance of Shakti Puja with the Maharaja and a select nobility participating in it is a periodic practice in the palace. A Bengali tantrik would make a clay image and clothe it with rich garments and jewelery, then the sacrificial slaughter of the bull and offering of liquor to the deity and its distribution among the participants, men and women as *Prasad* followed by a drinking spree. When it is past midnight, a bevy of naked virgins come in singing and dancing. As the dance builds itself up to the climax, there is the enactment of the sequence of *Srishti Rachna* (The Creation of Universe) in drunken frenzy

In the tradition of the ancient benevolent monarchs, the Maharaja along with one of his Darbaris goes out in the night disguised as a commoner. They come across a party singing to the accompaniment of dholak and cymbals. On inquiry, His Highness is told that they were devotees of Kali Mata and that they were going to Calcutta for celebration of Durga Puja. The Maharaja takes the first train next morning and goes to Calcutta. A fortnight later when the royal special returns, it is with the deity purchased by the state along with the Pujari duly employed. A temple is constructed in the outskirts of the capital and the image of Kali Mata installed in it.

At a banquet in Simla, the Maharaja meets the Punjab Governor's charming daughter. Late in the night when everyone is dead drunk, the girl is whisked away and outraged. How could the British rulers permit it? The Maharaja had to part with Simla and the adjoining territory of his state for this indiscretion.

The novel is packed with such startling anecdotes. No wonder that as the story moves towards the close, there is neither the Maharaja nor the Raj, we find an erstwhile princess marrying her tutor, a commoner.

Zimmin Puchhe Asman is a fascinating attempt at portraying the scenario in the strife-torn and militant infested Punjab of today. The scene is laid in the Punjabi University, Patiala and its surroundings, with teachers and students figuring in it. One of them is the author, Dalip Tiwana herself. It shows how the well-meaning youth are led astray and are sooner than later slaughtered by the security forces in genuine and not-so-genuine encounters.

Since the participants are University dons and students, the argument is invariably at adult level. Here is a specimen:

'Nowhere the Anandpur Saheb Resolution demand a State for the Sikhs; what it asks for is the status for the Sikh community that it had been promised.'

'Madam, I have no interest in politics. I never say any prayers. I never go to the Gurdwara. I do not know what demands the Sikh people have put forward. I have never participated in any agitation but there is something in my blood. The desecration of Akal Takht has hurt me deeply. For the first time I have realised that I am a Sikh and I am proud of it.'

There are ever so many similar meaningful observations sprinkled all over the text:

'Of late, the role of the police has been changed; they are there to serve the government only.'

'The State that has been blessed with the rivers, has the prior right over their waters.'

'What have we gained with the coming into being of the Punjabi Suba? It is at best like the paw of a sparrow. And now they ask for Khalistan. The Centre should let them have their way. They would die fighting with each other.'

'Those who say that Punjabi is not their language, why must we ram it down their throats? Let them forge a link with Hindi and merge in the mainstream.'

'After all Guru Gobind Singh's children were also killed by the rulers of the day!'

There are ever so many such remarks made by the protagonists which throw light on the conditions prevailing in the bedevilled State. Ever so many questions which the characters in the story ask each other. There is no one to provide the answers.

With her latest two novels, Dr Dalip Kaur Tiwana bids to leaving everyone of her contemporaries far behind in the realm of Punjabi fiction.

KSD

13

The Short Story

Short Story Writing

There is no one who does not have a story to tell. There is hardly anyone who has not felt like telling a story. There are ever so many of us who have attempted writing a story at one time or another.

The short story as a genre has been greatly popular in the West especially after the First World War. It is still popular in India though it is no more a hot favourite as it was in the forties when most of the leading short story writers emerged in the various Indian languages.

While the short story has ceased to occupy the place of pride in journals, it continues to fascinate the common reader.

The short story is different from the novel or the sketch. And then, we have to take care of character and action, interaction of character and plot, techniques of fore-shadowing and suspense, beginning, middle, ending, setting, style, theme, etc.

There is no denying the fact that today a book of reportage is more popular than the novel and the short story is yielding place to the magazine article.

It is the fault of the new fiction itself. It is negative, it is interior, it is inaccessible. The short fiction that is being written today in the West and in several quarters in India, particularly by our angry young men, represents a reaction against all that we subscribed to until yesterday.

The new fiction is anti-plot anti-character, it does not believe in interaction of plot and character. It is against meaning, against reality; it is a revolt against literary art. It is said that the new writer believes that since "so few people read fiction anyway these days,

there is no point in writing for readers." Or perhaps "the times we live in are too outlandish to be convincingly described in traditional and realistic ways."

The only way to learn writing short stories is reading short stories in hundreds and thousands. One must read all the leading short story writers in all the languages one knows. Only when one is fully saturated is one ready to write a short story of one's own. No amount of teaching of the technique really helps.

Planned writing is often the most pedestrian writing. What is needed is devotion to the art. The short story is as much poetic as poetry and as much dramatic as drama and yet it narrates an event and presents a situation or a character as vividly as it can.

When one is ready to write a short story, ideas come complete with words and the form they are going to take. The writer has just to put them together. Deep concentration, absolute involvement with the subject releases energy and energy makes for clarity. At times it surprises the writer to find where his writing is leading to.

It is said that Manchester wrote his voluminous book on the assassination of Kennedy in a bleak room of an out-of-the-way hotel. It contained just three articles—a writing desk, a chair and a photograph of Kennedy. His concentration was so deep that many a time he would call his wife "Jackie."

Creative writing asks for "tyag". It is a sort of asceticism. What James Joyce calls epiphany is a sudden spiritual manifestation. "Whether in the vulgarity of speech or gesture or in a memorable phrase, it is for the creative writer to arrest this with care."

A short story tells something that happened somewhere or happened to someone. It demonstrates a more harmonious relationship of all its aspects than any other literary form excepting, perhaps, lyric poetry can do.

KSD

The Short Story in Punjabi

The short story is a companion of the modern (*Adhunik*) writer. It was born with him, grew with him, attained maturity and established itself as one of them, whether it is Nanak Singh, Gur Baksh Singh or Sant Singh Sekhon. Some people believe that the short story as a genre lived with us in the form of fables, folk-tales, parables, legends and romances. All these have their own place and might

be assumed to have contributed to the richness and vitality of the short story, but as an art-form, the short story, as we have come to write and enjoy it, has travelled to us from the West. It was attempted in Hindi, Urdu and Punjabi and other Indian languages in the thirties when most of the so-called "modern" practitioners of the art emerged as writers of promise and before long dominated the entire literary scene.

The short story best portrays the milieu of the modern age. It can be as poetic as poetry, as dramatic as any drama and yet project life in a narrative form. The short story can even be without a story in it. It is short because the sensibility of the modern man does not accept long drawn-out yarns. He is used to speed. He is impatient. And the short story provides him relief from the frightfully hectic life which modern living condemns him to more and more with each passing day. It is indeed a fascinating phenomenon; almost all our senior short story writers today are equally outstanding practitioners of other genres like poetry and drama. Some of them have adapted their short stories into plays. Rajinder Singh Bedi based a number of his plays and even film scripts on his short stories with considerable success. There are short stories that border on poetry in their diction and intensity. A number of short stories would admirably lend themselves to poetry if only the writers chose to express themselves in that genre.

The short story is a highly exacting art. It can be the story of an age; it can be the picture of a split second arrested by the skill of the writer. It may have high drama pulsating in it in the most dramatic form. It may be as long as a novelette. It may be as short as a snatch of dialogue. It holds up the mirror to life. And the sort of life we have in our day and age, the short story does fullest justice to its complexity and its nuances.

There is nothing short about the short story. It is as it should be. However, there can be a long short story and a number of writers have attempted it. Krishan Chander in Urdu, Upendra Nath 'Ashk' in Hindi and Dalip Kaur Tiwana in Punjabi have some remarkable long short stories. Advisedly, perhaps, the short story is called Kahani in Urdu, Hindi and Punjabi. Attempts at calling it Laghu Katha in Hindi and Niki Kahani in Punjabi have not succeeded.

The short story is the youngest genre of Punjabi writing, but is, perhaps, the best developed. It is also the most popular form of

writing both with readers and creative writers. While the older generation among the contemporary writers continues to have a particular predilection for this form, there are a number of new writers with considerable promise who are exclusively devoted to short story writing.

The short story came to India at a crucial period in the history of Indian letters. The nation was in ferment. A massive movement for liberation from foreign rule was raging in the country. It involved particularly the imaginative youth and creative talent. Whenever suppression became severe, the movement would go underground. The writers and the artists became more subtle and more suggestive.

The main drama of India's heroic efforts to throw away the foreign yoke has the back-drop of the Russian Revolution. It was on this unique chapter in world history that our short story was nurtured. Yonder there, across the border, a new society had emerged that had brought about an unprecedented equality, banishing the privileged sections and restoring power to peasants and workers where it was due. It caught the imagination of the people with perception everywhere. The short story was a new tool in the hands of the creative writer. It lent itself admirably to advocating the cause of the poor, the under-privileged and the have-nots. Our short story writers depicted the plight of the repressed and rack-rented in vivid colours and tried to infuse in their readers a determined will to undo the injustice.

And the pendulum swung to the other extreme. In our efforts to paint the poor and the have-nots, the under-privileged and the suppressed, we started overdoing poverty, misery and filth. In our anxiety to project the poor, we chose the debased and the decrepit. In our search for the commonplace, we landed on scenes which were grim and lurid. Our characters were, more often than not, delinquent. There was a tilt towards morbidity.

Before long, we realised that this was not being progressive. It was neither socialist realism nor healthy depicting filth alone and propagating morbidity.

The evolution of the short story has had a lot to do with the evolution of the general reader. The widening of social contacts, the peaks of common experience and artistic receptivity play a vital role. The spread of education, the green revolution, the rapid industrialisation, the quicker means of communication are some

of the factors that have contributed to the development of the short story in Punjabi. What is failing it is the reading habit. But for this, it should certainly have done better.

The readership in Punjabi has woefully lagged behind. Apart from those who study Punjabi in the universities, there is hardly any worthwhile readership in the language. A keen reader with discrimination is a rare phenomenon.

The marginal readership that obtains is essentially uncultivated and poor in taste. Sensitive writing goes unappreciated; anything subtle remains above the head of the reader. At times this becomes heart-breaking. The inevitable result is that a number of front-rank writers publish their works first in Hindi and English translations and then in the original Punjabi.

The responsibility for this lack of a discriminating community of readers can be laid squarely at the door of the Punjabi publisher. There is hardly a publisher in Punjabi who does publishing in a strictly professional manner. A large section of them are text-book publishers and if they publish a general book, they still have their eye on the syllabus prescribed by the University Boards of Studies. The rest are devoted to bringing out reprints of Sikh scriptures or books on Sikh history and religion.

Pure literature, therefore, goes a-begging. Nanak Singh, Gur Baksh Singh and Mohan Singh published their own books. Amrita Pritam does so even today. Sant Singh Sekhon, Pritam Singh 'Safeer' and Harbhajan Singh have to stand in the queue for their turn at the publishers'. The new writer has little chance, he is heart-broken and frustrated.

No publisher in Punjabi has ever tried to build the image of a writer or that of good writing. Every writer has to fight his own battle. Every worthwhile writing faces the hazards of the uncultivated taste of an indifferent reader. Any bold writing, howsoever sensitive and well done, is stigmatised by the die-hard as obscéne and condemned vociferously. Ajeet Caur's short story "Panj Rapae Wali Gal" (Story Worth Rupees Five) shocked them. This is the story of two young lovers who have to pay a higher tip to the chowkidar of a park so that he leaves them undisturbed in an exclusive corner. In "Rashbharian" (Raspberries) by Kulwant Singh Virk, a husband who has decided to spend a night with a tourist girl in a dak-bungalow learns that his own wife has already spent a night there with her lover the previous week-end! Virk

happened to tell this story in the first person. And it is said, of all people it offended his own wife who felt scandalised. Balwant Gargi's short story "Amb" (The Mango) outraged a large number of his readers. The mango in this fine story is a symbol of a woman's breasts. One of my own short stories "Aje Pakistan Nahin Banya" (Pakistan has yet to Come) came in for a good deal of criticism and Kulwant Singh Virk had to rush to the press to vindicate it as sensitive writing with a social significance. This is the story of a Sikh young man and a few Hindus who are travelling in an upper class compartment from Rawalpindi to Lahore in the pre-Partition days. The rest of the two seats, it appears, have been reserved by a Muslim zamindar. When the train leaves Rawalpindi, the zamindar is all alone. He is joined by a young girl from a wayside station late in the night when all the passengers in the compartment are supposed to have gone to sleep. The Muslim zamindar makes love to the young girl in the compartment and then quietly walks away with her when the train halts at the next station. The members of the minority community watched this indignity hurled on them throughout the night and uttered not a word. And now that the arrogant zamindar has left, they start discussing the incident shamefacedly!

A collection of the world's greatest short stories published in West Germany some time ago carried two stories from India. Of these, one was from the Punjabi. The short story in Punjabi has indeed done rather well. Its future is no less bright with talented young writers devoted to the genre.

Sant Singh Sekhon, by all measures, is the father of the new short story in Punjabi. He showed the way and eminent fictionists like Nanak Singh, Guru Baksh Singh and later Gurmukh Singh 'Musafir' found in it a powerful medium of expression. Nanak Singh is better known as a novelist and yet he wrote a number of remarkable short stories like "Tash di Aadat" (The Habit of Playing Cards). Gur Baksh Singh was essentially a journalist, but he has to his credit sensitive short stories like "Kehru Das Numbria" (Kehru—the Bad Character). Similarly, Gurmukh Singh 'Musafir' was a poet-politician but he wrote a large number of fine short stories. His short story entitled "Khasma Khane" (The Good-For-Nothing) would do credit to any creative artiste. On the other hand,Sujan Singh devoted himself exclusively to short story writing. Mohan Singh and Amrita Pritam, leading poets in Punjabi, are equally

proficient as practitioners of the short story. Mohan Singh's short story entitled "Niki Niki Washna" (The Sweet Smell) remains a landmark in Punjabi short story writing. So is Amrita Pritam's "Panj Warhe Lambi Sadak" (A Road Five Years Long).

Kulwant Singh Virk, Ajeet Cour, Gulzar Singh Sandhu, Navtej, Santokh Singh Dheer, Mohinder Singh Joshi, Gurdial Singh and Dalip Kaur Tiwana appeared on the scene a little later but they were quick to make up and keep pace with the earlier generation of short story writers. Both in form and content, they are hardly distinguishable from their senior contemporaries. There is evidence of the influence of Marx or Freud or of both on all of them. Their approach is essentially psychological; rather subtle in some and not so subtle in others.

Among the crop of new practitioners of this art-form, Gurbachan Singh Bhuller, author of *Wakhtan Mare* (The Oppressed), seems to be eminently equipped to cultivate this genre. He is sensitive and has a keen eye for detail. He has an equally rich experience of the rural and urban scenes of the Punjab today. He is perceptive and healthy in approach. His writing is tidy and chiselled. He believes in economy of words. There is no padding whatsoever in the 14 short stories included in the collection. He talks about people who would rather kill than hurt the enemy. A physical hurt, according to one of his characters, invariably lands one in jail, while with a murder, one can hope to go scotfree. It can be lack of conclusive evidence in one case or some other legal lacuna in another. Bhuller's poor cobbler is driven to murder by the heartless municipal corporation squad of raiders who would not let him sit on the roadside under the shade of a tree and earn his living by mending people's shoes unless he bribed them regularly like other pedlars. His language is close to the folk idiom; a little too close, perhaps. At times it tends to be irksome. There should be a reasonable proportion of dialect in fiction, otherwise it is jarring to the ears. The use of dialect in a short story is like sauce, it should supplement, the reader must not be fed on sauce alone. Some of our new fictionists owe this to Gurdial Singh, who makes indiscriminate use of Malwa dialect, obliterating the distinction between standard literary idiom and the language of the characters figuring in the narrative. Bhuller does not seem to belong to the tribe of angry young men, though at times he appears to have a tendency to preach violence. The sensitive writer in him, however,

encounters characters like Kartara in a short story entitled "Khoon" (The Murder). His brother has been murdered in a village feud. In due course, he expects to marry his wife, so that the family property remains intact. But his sister-in-law would have none of it. She shifts to her parents' house in a distant village along with her child and starts managing the property from there. Kartara longs to have the share of his brother added to his land, so that he is counted amongst the well-to-do landlords of his village. The only way is to eliminate his brother's son. Kartara has waited for several years. He can wait no longer. In a mad frenzy, he goes to the village of his sister-in-law's father. It is late in the evening. He meets a young lad outside the village who could perhaps tell him the way to his sister-in-law's house. He engages him in dialogue:

> "Aren't you afraid of going out all alone at this late hour?"
> "No."
> "The children in our village are scared of going out alone like this."
> "I know no scare." The boy replies fearlessly.
> "In our village, bad characters kidnap lads like you," says Kartara laughing.
> "Who dare touch me? I have Kartara the lion of an uncle in Malwa. He would make mincemeat of anyone..."

The lad was evidently none other than his own nephew. Kartara forgot his evil designs and took the child in his embrace with tears in his eyes.

Gurdev Singh Rupana is another new short story writer with considerable promise. His collection of short stories entitled *Ik Tota Aurat* (A Piece of Woman) shows his remarkable grip over the technique of the short story. Unlike Bhuller, he is analytical and tries to delve deep into the recesses of the mind of his characters. Bhuller reflects the age, Rupana captures the moment. He is subtle, psychological and poetic in his treatment. A number of his short stories are as tender and as intense as poetry. His characters are out-of-the-way, unlike those of many other young short story writers; one does not come across familiar faces in his writings. When her son protests why she must make the bride do all the dirty chores so soon after their marriage, the mother tells him, "If she is not involved in all this, a charming girl like her is not going to stick to a plain-looking husband like you." Gopal Krishan, a school teacher

in "Apna Hani" (My Age), is being pulled up for indiscipline in the class: "You must beat the boys," suggests the headmaster, "Sir, I am paid for teaching the boys, not for beating them," says Gopal Krishan innocently. Chinto has a crush on her brother-in-law. Helpless, she gets into his empty bed after he has gone away, having spent a night at her parents' house. "Balam" (The Lover), the first story in the collection, presents a character who is not quite normal. He does not know his mind. He fails to communicate himself. And yet he evokes sympathy. By the time one has read the story he has endeared himself to the reader. It is difficult to forget him. Perhaps the most outstanding story in the collection is "Hawa" (The Atmosphere) in which Madan who has walked through dead bodies of the victims of a communal riot on his way home finds himself incapable of reacting to the death of his only child who has fallen from the terrace of the house and died immediately before he arrives. There are 15 stories in the collection and not one seems to disappoint a discriminating reader. The stories relate to ordinary people who are most extraordinary in their reactions to everyday situations in our society. The most outstanding event in the life of "Masterji" (The School Teacher) is his promotion to teach Class Four children after he has taught Class One all his life. He is happy because unlike students in Class One, students in Class Four will run all sorts of errands for him. Rupana's short stories are really short and also sweet.

While the short story as an art-form came to us from the West and we continue to be inspired by the Western short story, we have also a number of promising Punjabi writers residing abroad who are deeply interested in literature in their mother-tongue, short stories in particular. (See Appendix I—The Punjabi Writer Abroad). Of those Raghbir Dhand in the UK and Ravinder Ravi in Canada are more active.

Raghbir Dhand's collection of short stories entitled "Uss Paar" (Yonder) is noted for its portrayal of the life and problems of the non-White communities living in the UK. It is a sordid tale of discrimination against coloured people ("Nawin Qisam de Nag"—New Type of Serpents), the rigours of the conditions of work abroad (Dirty Colour), the pangs of separation from near and dear ones back home ("Lal Lakir"—The Red Line) and the determined struggle of the non-Whites to fight for their rights. However, the picture is not totally dark. It is relieved here and

there by understanding Whites who not only show sympathy but also join hands with the coloured people to win for them a respectable place in their society. The slogan—"Black and White, unite to fight", at times, seems to be catching. Then the solicitude of the people of Indian and Pakistani origin for each other is heart-warming. In order to appreciate the beauty of our country and the greatness of our own people, it appears we have to go abroad and look at India from a distance. The emigrants have nostalgic memories of the fascinating Punjab countryside, its glorious weather, its bright mornings and its colourful evenings. In his short story entitled "Badboo ton Khushboo Tak" (From Bad Odour to Sweet Scent), Raghbir Dhand tries to show that it is perhaps not the colour that creates trouble, maybe the shoe pinches elsewhere. The prosperous-looking American negro on his way to fight his country's war in Vietnam has two white girls, one on each side, who seem to admire him no end in a West Berlin restaurant. Then why this discrimination? The author is in search of a solution:

> "You think it is God who feeds us?" asks Vineet, a coloured boy.
> "Of course," Jill, his white companion, replies.
> "Millions of people in our country either starve or are half-starved; why doesn't God feed them?" Vineet asks.
> "I don't know," says Jill, the reply which every white man has on the tip of his tongue when asked an inconvenient question.

Ravinder Ravi was in Kenya for quite some time before he moved to Canada. His collection of short stories *Kaun Pratikaun* (Angles and Counter Angles) presents the East African scene as convincingly as Raghbir Dhand portrays life in the UK particularly of the people of Indian origin. This is Ravi's fourth collection of short stories, his earlier works being *Charavi* (The Cowherd), *Jurm de Patar* (The Culprits), and *Shehr Vich Jungle* (The Jungle in a Town). Better known as an experimentalist poet, Ravi is also a short story writer of considerable accomplishment. His stories depicting the life of the East African tribals add another dimension to new Punjabi writing. He glorifies the human in the African tribal, contrasting it with the scheming white man and the unscrupulous Asian. His stories have bones and muscle, flesh and finish. Here is a new voice without an amateurishness about it. He makes the facts and incidents of the fascinating African life vitally

compelling. Like a clever cameraman, he focuses his lens from various angles, so that the picture that emerges is complete in all respects. He shows his countrymen clamouring to go to under-developed Africa with a view to making money—how they amass wealth by fair means or foul and then siphon it to their people back home through equally improper channels. As against this, the native Africans are simple and unsophisticated. Their sex life is uninhibited. Nyakrenga fell in love with her classmate when studying in the fifth class. By the time she was in the seventh class, her boy friend ran away, not being able to match her wild passion. Nyakrenga now takes on other men. Since her people would have none of it, she leaves her village and goes to the town. She runs a bar and has all sorts of men chasing her. Yet the eternal woman in her waits for the man after her heart. When he arrives, she shuts herself out to everyone else, the crowd of her lovers knocking at her door in utter frenzy. As against this, Sham Lal, an Indian trader in "Ik Sauntantar Chhin" (A Free Moment) has no scruples in sleeping with the local maid-servant the first time he is left alone by his wife, despite the fact that the native maid-servant has thick lips, flat nose, and is of ebony dark colour. To my mind, Ravinder Ravi is best at capturing the mood of the vital moment in life ("Henera, Eucalyptus te Agg"—Darkness, Eucalyptus and Fire). A shrewd artist, he uses a few flourishes of his brush and paints a picture that catches like a cobweb the iridescence of emotion that cannot be easily captured by narrating a story.

Ravinder Ravi has a maturity of outlook on life and unlike many other young writers, he is both versatile and prolific.

Mohan Bhandari, a Punjab Government employee based at Chandigarh, is not so new a voice in the Punjabi short story. He has been at short story writing for about a decade. In one of his characters in *Kath di Latt* (The Wooden Leg) he expostulates: "The new writers slave as clerks and school teachers all day long and at night sit down to write whatever comes to their mind. They talk about pulling down stars from the sky and yet they never so much as get up from the bed and pour for themselves a glass of water." This may, indeed, be true of a large number of new writers. There is no evidence of struggle in their life. Advisedly, Mohan Bhandari restricts himself to what happens in the mind of his characters. His short stories are generally psychological studies aimed at probing the mind of the have-nots of our society: the clerk, the

poor landless peasant, the unemployed, the dweller of the slum. At times he becomes too realistic to the extent of becoming morbid. "Mother-in-law, for heaven's sake, tell me, which son of yours have I been married to?" ("Gila"—Complaint). Similarly, a character in the short story "Kath di Latt" that lends its title to the collection, urinates in the mouth of a wounded soldier clamouring for water on the battlefield and then quietly removes his watch which he continues to wear on his wrist ever since! To me it appears, amongst the new voices in the Punjabi short story, Mohan Bhandari is an instance of a highly sensitive young man who has not been able to outlive the influence of the older generation of short story writers completely. He is hanging between the crop of writers nurtured by Sant Singh Sekhon, on the one hand, and Rupana and Bhuller, the newest among the new, on the other. At times he seems to suggest that the story is the thing. His short stories entitled "Bhatke Hoye Lok" (People Gone Astray), "Lachhmi", "Vishwash Ho Jan Ton Pichhon" (After Restoring Faith) are skilfully woven with the surprise ending of a consummate artiste. At the same time, he appears to be keeping pace with the writers of his generation when Shivcharan in "Tidkia Hoya Sheesha" (The Cracked Mirror), after suffering the humiliations of a lifetime as an underdog goes over in the end to the strikers and is heard shouting 'Inqilab Zindabad!'

Mohan Bhandari has two more collections of short stories—*Til Chawli* (The Rice Game) and *Manukh di Perr* (In Man's Footsteps) published earlier.

With Buta Singh, we have come back to square one. It seems the Punjabi short story has completed a full circle and stands where it was in the forties; a little more confident, a little more sure of its ground. While reading his collection of short stories entitled *Supnian di Sham* (The Evening of Dreams), one gets the impression of an old man who has dyed his hair and passes off successfully as not quite so old. Some of his stories are as mature in technique and as familiar in the choice of subjects that they give the impression of a senior writer reasserting himself. At his best, Buta Singh, like Mohan Bhandari, seems to be hanging between the old and the new. A large number of his short stories are in the form of monologues; certainly not so easy a technique to be handled by a less skilled writer. His characters reminisce engagingly and carry the readers along into the mysteries of their

past. He recreates the medieval times with *rajahs* and *nawabs* holding sway or an old man indulging in nostalgic memories of days gone by. To those who are introverts and tend to be introspective, life is seldom a bed of roses. Accordingly, Buta Singh's characters, more especially women, are more often than not ailing physically or mentally. They are afflicted with dreadful diseases like cancer or they seem to be clinging to superstitious practices and unhealthy values entirely out of tune with the times. The Muslim way of living has almost disappeared in Punjabi writing in India after Partition. It is delightful to find Buta Singh presenting Muslim characters with sympathy and understanding. It is also true of his other two collections of short stories—*Lau Chaubare Di* (Light of the Second Storey) and *Angua di Vel* (The Angua Creeper).

On the whole, the new short story in Punjabi gives the impression that it is not much trendy; maybe the senior writers and their style of writing still hold sway.

As one looks around for new voices in the Punjabi short story, one comes across some familiar faces; they are new and yet perhaps not so new. These are—Jaswant Singh Virdi, Devinder and Dr. Maheep Singh who entered the portals of Punjabi writing through Hindi, a new phenomenon of Independent India.

Jaswant Singh Virdi, better known for his collection of short stories entitled *Apni Apni Seema* (Everybody's Limitations), is city-born. His stories relate to the trials and tribulations of the lower middle class, particularly the teaching community. There are young graduates aspiring to be teachers. Those employed are anxious to retain their jobs by fair means or foul. The drudgery of private tuition-work to supplement a paltry salary. And then retiring with a bleak future staring them in the face. They live in one-room tenements, dark and dingy, dreaming to have a house of their own. They would have their wives work to bring in more money and yet expect them to be available to greet them when they return home, cook meals for them and rear their children. Virdi writes about the life he knows and never for a moment does he stray beyond its frontiers. He is thoroughly sincere and there is a note of authenticity about his writing. He has seen the people he talks about from close quarters; he knows them intimately. The petty-minded husband who lords over his wife to the extent of appearing sadistic. The mother who would like her daughter to

be educated and employed before she is married. The telephone operator who has lost the melody of her voice shouting "Hello", "Hello" day in and day out. The ailing school teacher who is prescribed medicine but has to postpone taking it till the first of the month when he would receive his salary. "Awaz" (The Call) is, perhaps, the most sensitive short story in the collection. It is about a working couple in Delhi who have to leave their child behind with their parents in Amritsar. Dead tired after the day's work, the wife returns home and hears a baby wailing in the neighbourhood. She is reminded of her own child. The mother in her wishes to go and caress the crying child but then she is too tired to get up after a long day's strenuous labour. Virdi has experimented with form in his short stories like "Phoenix". He seems to have succeeded in some and not so much in others. He is honest and unassuming. This is the hallmark of his writing. There is poetic realism and pictorial accuracy in his stories. The incidents he narrates have the warmth and sharpness of life around us.

Devinder, the author of *Ik Pal da Masiha* (The Healer of the Moment), was on the programme staff of All India Radio, Delhi. As a programmer, he has been exposed to the best tradition of writing with opportunities to come in touch with a cross-section of writers and also to watch listeners' reactions to them. Not infrequently, he got writers to discuss the creative process with their readers and critics. He has been in the mainstream of literary activity in the capital for over three decades. I maintain that only those writers have a right to indulge in literary experimentation who have acquitted themselves first in the traditional forms. Devinder is eminently qualified for it. He has to his credit short stories like "Chitti Chadar" (The Clean Sheet) meticulously constructed with plot interest on the lines of an old master like Sujan Singh. And there are ever so many stories in which he seems to be experimenting with form and content. Devinder paints the jungle of modern civilization. Let us have some glimpses of it in his own words:

> "I have no mother, no sister, no daughter. I have only drain-pipe pants, a multi-coloured T-shirt and loafer shoes."
> "In Delhi people introduce their wives as unmarried sisters to their bosses."
> "The temples have television sets, transistors and drinks cabinets. They are dens of drug-smoking."

"Why must every old building come in the way of the new building? Why must we have only old men as our judges? Why must the decision-making be a prerogative of the old? Why must the future of every young man and every young girl be in the hands of the aged?"
"Is it not a fact that you sleep with me and think of someone else all the while?"

"Before she died, she beqeathed to her a sackful of filthy abuses and swear words. 'One day it will come in handy to you,' said she."
"The brother-in-law's body smells of chocolate, I'll sleep with him."

Devinder talks about the rural folk who commit robberies when bored, having nothing better to do after the harvest. And the city folk who sell empty beer bottles and with the money drink endless cups of tea, while their short stories languish, their poetry pines, and their essays wither away unattended in a corner. "Waddi Man Dhupen Baithi Hai" (The Old Mother Sits in the Sun), "Dar Wali Than" (A Place to be Afraid of), and "Zukam te Chocolate" (The Common Cold and Chocolate) are admirable examples of the new short story. They have an organic movement and rhythm of images. Unlike his contemporaries, Devinder shows considerable restraint. He owes this probably to the discipline acquired in broadcasting. The character-sketch of the homosexual in his short story entitled "Barsati" (The Terrace Apartment) would have been embarrassing in the hands of a less disciplined writer. Devinder is a writer with more or less exclusive experience of life in the capital. The buildings in New Delhi appear to him like beautiful women.

Dr. Maheep Singh, a distinguished student of Hindi literature, has come to Punjabi writing like the legendary prodigal son. He has brought with him the best and the worst features of the Hindi short story. What seems to help him is the richness and vitality of the idiom in his mother-tongue. What lets him down is the mental make-up of his characters. It is disconcertingly similar. He talks about people either in Bombay or in Delhi. Almost all of them belong to the lower middle class with identical problems, ticketed and docketed, as it were. The young girl is deceived by a number of young men one after another and she has come to accept it as a way of life (Blotting Paper). The young man longs to be on his own and yet he must lean on his father's reputation for bettering

his prospects in life ("Puttar"—The Son). The wife needs the husband just to give her protection, the rest she can manage herself ("Pardarshik"—The Transparent). A change of dress changes the mentality of the people. ("Third Class, First Class"). The wife defies her husband and starts feeling miserable soon thereafter. She longs to serve him with the devotion of her mother and her mother's mother ("Uljhan"—Dilemma). The most powerful story in the collection *Kala Baap Gora Baap* (The Black Father the Fair Father) is "Pull te Pani" (The Bridge and the Water), where the scene is laid in a Punjab village. A refugee Sikh woman, on her way to Punjab Saheb on pilgrimage, is greeted most heartily by the people of her former village who had come all the way to the railway station to find out if there was anyone known to them among the pilgrims. Those who had hounded them out the other day would not let the guard start the train until they had talked about the good old days to their heart's content. It is indeed a moving piece in the collection.

What the new writers have abundantly given to the Punjabi short story is the qualities of realism and poetry that were badly needed. They have created a host of living characters who walk out of the stories into independent existences and it becomes difficult to forget them. There are stories which arrest a fleeting moment or a mood, there are those which glance at life obliquely at a tangent, and those which are cut out of life with edges still raw, there are some which are pictorial, there are others which are pieces of flat reportage and so on.

The short story in Punjabi is no doubt the best developed genre today.

KSD

The Beginnings

A type of short story had begun to be written in Punjabi in the first decade of the twentieth century. Charan Singh Shaheed (1903–1935 A.D.) can be said to be a pioneer in this period. He seems to have realised the essential character of the short story as it was being written by his contemporaries in Europe, chiefly Maupassant in French, Chekov in Russian. He made a departure by making his short stories different from short novels, by taking up single, isolated incidents, giving them the form of stories, but he makes humour the mainstay of his stories and misses the delicacy

and nuance that characterise Chekov's short stories and the finesse and artistic skill of Maupassant. Even when he attempts to write a story with a serious import the treatment is that of a fable with an eye to a moral. He published two collections of short stories of this kind under the titles, *Hasde Hanju* (Tears of Laughter) and *Ronde Hanju* (Tears of Lament). Giani Hira Singh Dard (1889–1965) is another writer of short stories of this period but his stories again remain short narratives with a moral purpose. These were published under the title *As Dian Tandan* (Threads of Hope). Joshua Fazal Din (1903–1985) published his short stories in the first instance in Persian script so that the titles of his collections read like Urdu, such as *Adabi Afsane* (Literary Tales) and *Akhalaki Kahanian* (Moral Tales). Only one collection *Nikian Kahanian* (Short Stories) has a truly Punjabi title. Many of his stories are like the parables of the Bible and other fables or Christian moral tales. Nanak Singh, Gurmukh Singh 'Musafir' and Gur Baksh Singh belong to this generation, but they wrote their short stories in the thirties and later decided to write in the style and trend set by the three practitioners of the really modern short story discussed in the following pages. Nanak Singh published his short stories in four collections with the titles *Sadhran de Har* (Garlands of Unfulfilled Desires), *Hanjhuan de Har* (Garlands of Tears), *Midhe Hoe Phul* (Crumpled Flowers) and *Thandian Chhavan* (Cool Shades). As the titles indicate, these stories are mainly sentimental, with a more or less clear moral aim such as the cruelty of relatives towards their orphaned wards, the cruel lot of orphaned children and widows or the hypocrisy of men with religious pretensions and the love and affection of mothers and aunts towards their children. Even when he attempts to be realistic and ironical, the exaggeration of sentiment spoils the artistic effect so that many stories become romantic narratives or sentimental caricatures.

SSS

Gur Baksh Singh (1895–1971)

Gur Baksh Singh is basically a prose writer and his short stories seldom acquire a more artistic form than that of a prose narrative. The ten volumes of short stories include *Nag Prit da Jadu* (The Magic of the Love Serpent), 1940; *Anokhe te Ikalle* (Unique and Alone), 1940; *Asmani Mahanadi* (The Great River of the Skies), 1940; *Vina Vinod* (The Charm of the Lyre), 1942; *Pritan de Pahredar*

(Sentinels of Love), 1946; *Bhabi Maina* (Sister-in-law Maina), 1946; *Prit Kahanian* (Love Stories), 1950; *Shabnam*, 1955; *Zindgi Waris Hai* (Life is the Heir), 1960; and *Rang Sahikda Dil* (Heart Beating for Colour), 1970. All except *Shabnam* and *Rang Sahikda Dil* are collections of romantic and sentimental narratives. He himself wrote in 1960 in the preface to the fourth volume of *Vina Vinod*: "My aim in writing these stories is not so much to be an original and artistic story-writer as to awaken my contemporaries to the wrong social values." The main theme of his stories is love. In the introduction to *Vina Vinod* he writes: "Love and religion are a single human sentiment. Love is the starting point and religion the destination." His concept of love is of course idealistic and platonic and therefore many of the lovers in his stories are such close relations that their love would be incestuous if it were not platonic. It looks as if he puts before men and women a world in which love is a make-believe and makes his characters undergo intense suffering. His idea of love derives from Punjabi folk-tales of love many of which he has rewritten in a collection named *Ishak Jinah de Hadin Rachia* (Those in Whose Bones Love has Seeped), a dictum of his is a current saying among most women of the middle class who would fain play with love without burning their fingers. Love is not possession, it is recognition. Gur Baksh Singh complains that in our society man has made himself miserable by adopting false values. However he takes notice of the other side of the picture also in which in his own words, "Very often our life is not a picture of our own intention, but a compulsion of circumstances."

In his earlier stories, before he had imbibed socialist ideas, his main device was that of contrast between modes of love and life in the United States on the one hand and those in Indian societies on the other. Americans of both sexes he found mix freely without catching the taint of physical sex without arousing ugly suspicions. On the other hand, in India even first cousins or other near relations cannot show affection or fondness towards each other without incurring the risk of suspicion in the family circle and social censure. Most of all, Gur Baksh Singh deplored the system of marriage in our country where economic considerations outweigh impulses of the heart so that marriage by love is an impossibility. As if to compensate for this deprivation, Gur Baksh Singh made cousins and other near relations contract affectionate relations, keeping clear of any sexual involvement. Thus a young

woman might enjoy intense affection for a cousin and yet marry a different man without a sense of guilt. Of course, Gur Baksh Singh did not see that even in the West such relations were only a platonic illusion or outright deception. Perhaps because as a student in the United States he did not have intimate relations with American girls because of the wide gulf that yawned between persons of Indian nationality and Americans who treated them with an aggressive patronising sense of superiority. In the forties Gur Baksh Singh came under the influence of the socialists and began to feel that mere social reforms like widow remarriage and marriage by love rather than by contract do not go far in ameliorating the human situation nor is love, even in its platonic purity, the cure for social evils. Still romantic idealism remains powerful as if the socialist principle fitted only loosely in this frame. In this mixture human beings are divided into two classes, one that is guided solely by the lust for money and they generally belong to the upper class. The other variety are poor but they relish humanist values. "Bhabi Maina" is the story of a Hindu widow who is not allowed to remarry and seeks solace in the affection that she can shower on her brother-in-law, a boy of ten or eleven. In "Kesari de Gadd" (Kesari's Cart), Kesari is married to an elderly landlord but her compensation is her platonic love for a young man Ujjagar Singh. Parmeshari in "Parmeshari Da Viah" (Parmeshari's Marriage) is a girl of a poor family married to a rich money-lender. In "Bum Bahadur" the oppressors are the priest, Mata Din and the police officers. In "Kehru Das Nambria" (Kehru the Registered Bad Character) considers himself a criminal but the writer consoles him by telling him that he is a victim of circumstances. In "Raizada Vidhi Chand", Vidhi Chand kills his first wife and marries another woman Rukmani, who also is threatened with death, so that she leaves her husband to join the socialist movement, leaving the field open for her evil husband to have a third wife.

Thus Gur Baksh Singh gradually veers round to the socialist way of thinking but with only partial success. Even as late as 1970, he cannot resist the temptation of writing stories of ideal love, like "Meri Gulbadan" and "Ik Rang Sahikda Dil" (A Heart Longing for Excitement).

SSS

Giani Gurmukh Singh 'Musafir' (1899–1976)

Giani Gurmukh Singh 'Musafir' was a man of the masses. He had a rich experience of the life around him. A keen student of literature all his life, he made it a point to read and keep in touch with contemporary writing.

'Musafir' could take liberties with form since he had mastered the traditional technique of short story writing. He had undergone intense discipline before experimenting with the form.

Another feature of Giani Gurmukh Singh 'Musafir's' art of story writing is his utmost economy of detail. He never employs another stroke where one would suffice. He is suggestive and fond of using symbols. His experience of life is so vast that he never lacks analogous situations to heighten the effect. Reading his fiction, one finds at times a number of stories peeping out through his narrative.

Like a true artiste, he has the capacity to laugh at himself, even at his beloved wife, while sympathising with and highlighting the sterling qualities of the common man, the "have-not", the oppressed and the rack-rented. This is what he did in his famous short story "Khasman Khane" (The Accursed).

The leader is mobbed by displaced persons with all sorts of problems. Day and night they chase him. They would not leave him alone even to eat his meal in peace. His wife has lost all her patience. She calls them "accursed". Then a moment comes when out of sheer desperation, she drives the poor refugees away. A little later, a party of rich visitors arrives in their car. They wish her husband to put in a word for them to an officer in another town. It is late but they have their own vehicle. The wife does not object to it. However, after their job is done in a town about a hundred miles away from his house, they leave the leader alone and drive away to attend to something else. Left on his own, he takes the midnight train back home. The winter is severe. He does not have any heavy clothing to protect him. Piqued by the callous behaviour of the rich, as he comes out of the railway station the next morning, he is picked up by a poor taxi-driver, a displaced person who drives him home with solicitous care and devotion. When his wife learns about his plight, she is left wondering who is really accursed.

'Musafir' did not spare even the government of which he was

an important functionary. Every time he had an opportunity, he took his party and his leadership to task for one lapse or another. In a much talked about short story entitled "Sattai January" (January 27), he satirises in a gentle manner the fanfare of the Republic Day parade at which the Queen of England is the guest of honour. Jhandu and Nanu are among a battalion of sweepers engaged in clearing the debris of squalor left after the parade grounds by the spectators of the Republic Day *tamasha*. They were there to sweep the place on the eve of Republic Day, they are here again to tidy up the place after the show Day. But they were nowhere to witness the parade for which you need either an invitation or night-long vigil occupying a vantage point in the biting cold of a winter night.

'Musafir' started his literary career as a poet. He remains a poet of no mean repute even today. And yet a stage came when he began attaching more importance to his short stories, for he enjoyed writing them more. He found fulfilment of his poetic instinct in it. His short stories at times are as subtle, as tightly constructed and as lyrical as poetry. There is an internal rhythm in his narrative, the patterns that he weaves while telling his stories are essentially poetic. He said in an interview: "I believe that I am more successful as a short story writer. However, as long as my short story does not acquire a poetic flavour, it does not satisfy me much."

When Giani Gurmukh Singh entered the field as a short story writer, the Punjabi short story was considerably developed. Nanak Singh had already written his "Tash de Patte" and Sujan Singh his "Ras Lila", Gur Baksh Singh his "Anviahi Maan" and Sant Singh Sekhon his "Pemi de Nyane". In our immediate neighbourhood Krishan Chander and Rajinder Singh Bedi, Upendra Nath 'Ashk' and Saadat Hasan Manto were looming large as writers of short fiction. While reviewing *Swer Sar* in 1941 as editor of *Akali Patrika*, 'Musafir' remarked: "These stories read like poems." He could, evidently, distinguish between a good short story and a bad one. It would, therefore, not be fair to say that the short story writer in Giani Gurmukh Singh 'Musafir' had to travel the entire gamut from a narrative writer weaving plots to an experimentalist writing the story without a story. Some of his earlier stories like "Sab Aachha" (All is Well), "Baghi di Dhi" (The Rebel's Daughter) and "Reshmi Leeda" (The Silk Scarf) are as well done as his better

known later stories like "Ik Nawan Paisa", (A Naya Paisa), "Balladhwal", "Ajaib", and "Duchita Nand" (Double-minded) marked for their subtlety and a deeply psychological approach.

"Sab Aachha", one of Musafir's earliest short stories, is the work of a conscious artisle. The way the writer enhances the interest of the nárrative with anecdotes, and the quiet inevitability with which the story moves towards the tragic end of the unsophisticated new prisoner called Jalal, is no work of a novice. More important is the subtle manner in which the writer makes the reader realise how language loses its meaning with its indiscriminate usage under abnormal conditions. "All is well" for the guard with a prisoner lying seriously ill. "All is well" with Gurra who has been sentenced to seven years' imprisonment. "All is well" with Budha Singh whose appeal against the death sentence has been rejected. "All is well" with the jail staff when Jalal's dead body is being removed to be handed over to his people after his brief illness in the jail hospital. It is not merely a denunciation of jail administration, the story aims at educating the reader in a most convincing manner about the state of affairs in Indian jails.

Technically, "Baghi di Dhi" is a perfect piece. Tightly constructed, it highlights the theme by focussing the searchlight on it from various angles. The requirements of economy in a short story demanded that the writer break the thread of the narrative and pick it up again and again to weave it into an artistic pattern. The artist in Musafir has done it dexterously. It is not without purpose that the writer paints a government employee avoiding a freedom fighter's daughter like the plague and the poor sweeper woman breaking the hospital discipline and escorting the mother released from jail a few hours earlier to the ailing patient when no visitors are permitted. It seems the daughter was waiting for her mother to arrive so that she could breathe her last. The mother came not a moment too soon. The story presents, most successfully, the determination of a freedom fighter's family as well as the pathos of a young daughter on her death-bed, suffering all alone in a hospital befriending the hospital menials.

"Reshmi Leeda" (The Silken Scarf) has a social theme aimed at condemning untouchability. There is a clever twist in the tail. A so-called low-caste labourer remains an untouchable even after he has been baptised with *amrit*. But those embracing Christianity are given education and trained in various skills which is real

emancipation. They do not have to wait for others to accept them as equals.

In "Thibbi Jutti", 'Musafir' is too subtle for the common reader. The cobbler's daughter shuts herself up in her room as the young man happens to visit her when she is all alone. But at the same time she insists, he must call on them later otherwise she would never talk to him. It is the same Nooro who had baked a *chapati* for him doing the dough in milk and he had eaten it forgetting that a Hindu must not eat at a Muslim's house. Several years elapse. Partition has separated them long. Visiting Pakistan as a pilgrim, he finds Nooro waiting for him on the railway platform. Her child is the image of the visitor from the alien country.

What we admire in Giani Gurmukh Singh's short stories like "Chumi de Chor" (Kiss Thieves) is the character of his large-hearted freedom fighter. He is not narrow-minded. Some of the political workers believing in class struggle refuse to believe that upper and upper-middle class society can also produce devoted revolutionaries. The fact of one's birth in a particular family condemns one for good. Thakur Janak Raj Singh is an aristocrat but a thorough gentleman. His only son, Khyal, plunges into the freedom struggle. He is hand in glove with the revolutionaries. His father is aware of it and when the occasion arises, does all that he can to help his son pursue the cause dear to his heart.

Reading his short stories again, one grows more and more convinced that Musafir's earlier short stories are more meaningful and better constructed than his later work. It seems that sophistication is not his cup of tea. He is best when he tells his own story. And how convincingly he does it!

Says Principal Teja Singh: "With his vast experience, Gurmukh Singh 'Musafir' draws stories from life itself. He tells about suffering with a pen dipped in blood. And the paper on which he inscribes his tale gets lacerated."

The expanse of Giani Gurmukh Singh 'Musafir's' short stories is panoramic indeed. He writes about the freedom struggle, social norms of his society, Hindu-Muslim relations, Partition and its painful memories, refugees and their rehabilitation, the advent of freedom and the achievements and lapses of the government in power, and then about man, his day-to-day problems, his aspirations hidden in the recesses of his heart and his many heart-aches. At times he appears to be just narrating a tale, while at others he is

essentially psychological in his approach, delving deep into the subconscious and unconscious of his characters. At times it is a simple character-sketch, while at others the main interest of his short story is the atmosphere that he is able to create skilfully. And then there are stories without a story in them. The hallmark of Giani Gurmukh Singh 'Musafir's' short story writing is the message that he wishes to convey, the thought-content of his writing.

Though he arrived on the short story scene late, he is eminently proficient in employing the various tools of a short story writer like dramatic dialogue, symbol, satire, and so on. 'Musafir' has created some remarkable short stories that have become immortal. He was awarded the Sahitya Akademi Award posthumously in 1978.

KSD

Sujan Singh (b. 1909)

It was about the middle of the thirties that Sujan Singh, Kartar Singh Duggal and Sant Singh Sekhon began writing short stories in a distinct Western form. Nanak Singh who was getting established as a novelist and Gur baksh Singh making his mark in prose writing and literary journalism, both of an earlier generation, also turned to writing an occasional short story more or less in the new style but because they practised in this form only as a second string to their literary bow, their short stories did not achieve that artistic finish and quality which characterises the short stories of its major practitioners.

Of the three pioneers named above, Sujan Singh published his *Dukh Sukh* (Woe and Happiness) in 1941; Kartar Singh Duggal his *Saver Sar* (Early Morning) in 1940 and Sant Singh Sekhon his *Samachar* (The News) in 1943. Sujan Singh's short stories have a rather pronounced social aim, as should be evident from the very title. But his manner of writing is romantic and even idealistic at this stage and the feeling of pathos about the life of the poor is not yet as deep as it becomes in his later stories, although "Pathan di Dhi" (Daughter of a Pathan) and "Ras Lila" (Stage Acting) show a sentimental pessimism over the life of the poor. The stories in this collection are competent in technique and Sujan Singh handles the action adroitly. For instance, "Ras Lila" is the story of a young Bengali woman married to a Punjabi contractor in his sixties. She has a feeling that she has missed the good luck of

loving and being loved. She invites a boy in his early teens to her house and worships him like Lord Krishna. She hands him a flute on which he plays like the Krishna of classical lore and she is deeply moved and falls to one side. The boy props her up like a grown-up lover and both embrace and kiss each other. This story may have some psychological meaning but is otherwise purely sentimental and even unrealistic. Similarly, "Lukan Michi" (Hide and Seek) is the story of an artist who wears *khaddar* and looks quite an ascetic to the writer. He loves the daughter of a rich family, Kanwal, who is also in love with him. The artist knowing that Kanwal will not be given him as a bride goes away and wanders like a sadhu from place to place. Kanwal's parents try to find him as she is inconsolable in his absence. Unable to find him, they are siezed with repentance and die. Then Kanwal sets out to find him. One day the two happen to meet in a train and recognise each other. The girl tells him of her desire of becoming his life-mate. But he slips away under the excuse of bringing her a cup of tea. Kanwal runs after him, calling him by his name Basant and falls on the platform.

In *"Dukh Sukh ton Pichhon"* (After Sorrow Happiness) Sujan Singh subdues his romanticism but now he begins to express his sense of social evil rather too plainly and romantically. In "Parahuna" (The Guest), Paramjit Singh, son of a rich family, who has become a Communist worker, goes to a village where he purposely looks for the house of a working class family to visit. There he is gladly received and given board and lodging for the night. His host Santa a backward caste worker asks him again and again to which caste he belongs and his only reply is that he is a Sikh and in the end admits that he belongs to the Khatri caste, making it clear that he does not believe in the hierarchy of caste. Before this the *zaildar* and priest of the village meeting him outside the village had resented his addressing both of them as *bhai*, for the right address for the *zaildar* was *sardar*. In the morning on information supplied by the *zaildar*, the police came to arrest him on the false accusation that he had given a seditious speech in the village. The police also ask Santa to hand over any seditious literature that Paramjit may have brought to his house. Santa looks for such literature in his house but finds none. Jagiro, his daughter, has concealed those books. The implication is that the younger generation is more susceptible to new ideas than its elders. In

"Swarg di Jhalak" (A Glimpse of Paradise), the writer after much hesitation, decides to walk along as he does not like his transport to be pulled by another man. The rickshawala is a man past his early youth, unmarried and with little hope of getting a wife. He sees a young educated, good-looking girl coming who hires his rickshaw. When she complains that he does not pedal his rickshaw fast enough, he takes it as a challenge to his manhood and starts exerting and now and then looking back to see if the girl was appreciating his effort. The writer makes a sentimental remark at the conclusion of the story that a word of appreciation from the girl would be a bliss to the rickshawala, a sort of feeling of being in paradise could not be his because he didn't possess a silver key to that paradise, and there are many more such sentimental remarks.

In "Baghan da Rakha" (The Guard of the Orchards), Baru, a poor man's teenage son employed to look after some orchards, catches fever and dies because nobody takes care of him. In "Pathan di Dhi", a Sikh clerk in a factory has more children than he could support and one female child is treated very cruelly by both him and his wife. A Pathan neighbour, unable to tolerate this cruelty, carries away the girl. When the case is reported to the police, the arrested Pathan pleads like a mad man that he does not want his daughter to be given to the Sikh couple who will kill her.

Sujan Singh's most famous three stories are "Kulfi" (Cream Cone), "Garam Kot" (Woollen Jacket) and "Razai" (Quilt), simple and rather naive in their implied meaning. They are included in the collection in *Narkan De Devte* (The Gods of Hell, 1965). These are stories of poor school teachers apparently like Sujan Singh himself in his earlier career, who could not afford to buy warm clothes in winter. In "Kulfi" written in the first person, the writer's son keeps asking his father for many days but in vain to buy him an ice-cream cone. One day the boy snatches it from another boy eating one, and the writer, instead of scolding him, admires his courage!

The fault often found in Sujan Singh's art is that he draws apparently socialistic conclusions from simple incidents in poor people's life and thus his stories lack the distance between incident and effect which is the true quality of art. He is either sentimental and idealistic or too direct in expressing his view of social injustice.

At this stage Sujan Singh is drawn towards writing about social

and political workers. In "Ghalti" (Mistake), an elderly woman works for an equally elderly Communist candidate and a rogue Bargam Singh spreads rumours about her as a woman of loose character. Even a man of goodwill like Atma Singh is misled when he is taken to hear a dialogue in the woman's house. But when Atma Singh comes to know that the romantic dialogue was a part of the play that was being rehearsed, he asks her pardon.

In the next collection, *Manukh te Pashu* (Man and Beast) Sujan Singh describes those who burn a cow in fire as beast because it was a Mohammedan's cow. They attribute sexual motive to a man (Siddhartha Kumar) who helps a poor woman in need. On the other hand, in "Mughal Khalsa", he tells of a good Mohammedan who comes to a Sikh friend's house besieged by Muslim rioters and gives him a number of cartridges, so that he may be able to withstand the attack long enough for some kind of police aid to arrive. As often happens with the writer of short stories in his last collection, *Sawal Jawab* (Question and Answer), the writer has not been able to keep a proper balance between event and comment.

Sujan Singh was honoured with the Sahitya Akademi Award for his collection of short stories *Shehar te Gran* in 1986.

SSS

Sant Singh Sekhon (b. 1908)

Sant Singh Sekhon's short stories have, like all his writings, a definitive bent, and incidents and plots of all varieties are seen through the transparent film of dialectical materialism or Marxism. He is a product of the progressive movement which was led by writers with leftist leanings though they refrained from imparting to the movement and the literature produced under its aegis a definitely Marxist slant. But they were certainly materialistic and scientific in their approach. Very often they were more content to criticise the social structure and individual action from a reformist angle which they thought progressive. Sekhon does not content himself with this much, he tries to convey class division as the dominant phenomenon in all social and individual conduct. For instance, the very first story in *Samachar*, entitled "Bhatta" (The Morning Meal) is apparently an account of two girl-friends of a tender age, Pito and Namo, going to the fields of Namo's father to deliver his morning meal. Pito is the daughter of a well-to-do peasant family which employs labour on the farm while the menfolk

generally do not perform any manual labour. But for the sake of company she goes with Namo. In the flattering behaviour of Namo's father towards Pito, and that of the old woman that they meet on their return journey, who is impolite towards Namo and apologetic towards Pito when she expresses her mild disapproval of it, the implication is of class distinction. In most of his stories there is an ironical comment on the behaviour of the upper classes and criticism of the religious and superstitious beliefs of both rich and poor, mostly indeed that of the poor, and even of their helplessness. In "Pamie de Niane" (Pemi's Children) along with the satire on the superstitious fear of ghosts among grown-up individuals when passing through a cremation ground at night there is an ironical remark made by one of the children that only ghosts fear God, not men. In "Dina" is described the rather tragic end of a boy of the working class who has such a domineering personality that his young companions accept him as some kind of leader and grown-ups are amused to say that Dina will one day become a Thanedar. But that domineering personality leads him into defiling a teenaged girl of a peasant family which brings on him the displeasure of the peasants generally who find an excuse to humiliate him and ultimately accuse him of stealing so that he is beaten and tortured so much. To escape the notice of the policemen, he jumps into the village well. He is taken out alive but after that he lives in the village as a defeated and humiliated man. In another story, "Anajamme" (The Unborn), he presents a young man of the middle class who has freshly received a commission in the army with his educated wife who is gone two or three months with child and a working class Bhayya woman with five or six children sitting near her on the platform waiting for the train. The young woman expresses her amusement but the young man tells her that while she laughs at the proliferation of the Bhayya woman, she should take care not to join the same crowd for whatever the government may do to increase productivity and welfare, its efforts will be defeated by those who are not yet born but are going to be born. In another story, "Formule" (Formulae), it takes up the question of the Indian Communists joining the war effort after the Soviet Union was invaded by Hitler's Germany, against the nationalist formula that we should put national interest before international interest. Among the characters in the story are a young man who joins the Communist

party, goes to prison but gets released when the Communist party joins the war effort, while his wife who hails from a rich family and had also joined the Communist party refuses to subscribe to the view that the war had become a "people's war" and remains in jail. Her mother who was strongly anti-Communist, criticises her son-in-law for resiling from Communism while her daughter has remained a staunch Communist. Similarly, the next volume *Kame te Yodhe* (Workers and Warriors) published in 1950 carries this trend forward in stories like "Varola" (Whirlwind). A good-looking woman, a Communist party worker is guarded by some policemen, while standing on the platform, she attracts a crowd around her from even the other platforms. The inference is that woman can contribute greatly to the popularity of a movement. But when her four-year old child strays a little, she rushes out of the crowd to bring him back and the crowd disperses, the implication being that for a woman her child is the strongest force working against her charm. In "Janani" (Mother), the wife of an underground Communist worker is in a maternity hospital for delivery of her child. Her husband, unable to resist the temptation of visiting her in this significant hour, goes to see her and is nabbed by the police. The woman goes into delirium and when the doctor comes, she keeps shouting that they have taken away her child. In "Kamm ki Chamm" (Work or Beauty), a young woman blemished slightly with pock-marks on her face gets rejected by those who come to see her on a proposal of marriage by her brother, but when some time later she gets employment and brings home her salary not only her brother's wife who regarded her as a burden becomes all polite and affectionate, but the family that had rejected her sends their acceptance of the offer. In "Adhi Vat" (Half-way Stage), 1953, Sekhon writes in the introduction that the readers will not find in his stories beggars, prostitutes, or criminals, for he considers worth writing about only the common people who do not accept defeat but keep on fighting against society's odds. However, in one story, "Qurbani da Bakra" (The Sacrificial Goat), he tells of a young British police officer (fictional substitute for Saunders shot by Bhagat Singh's companion) who is mistakenly killed by Indian terrorists instead of another (for Scott) who had committed violence on a demonstration and fatally hurt its leader. In "Tija Pahar" (The Third Quarter) published in 1956, the tone changes a little to describe the general cruelty of life in stories like

"Shahzada" (Prince) in which a beggar's child sitting on a sofa in a yet unlit first-class compartment is mistaken by incoming passengers for some rich man's child, and the beggar stands near him to attend on him. "Jagte Jiuna Kur Unah Da" (Their living in this world is unreal) is the story of an unmarried peasant youth who has gone nearly blind and leaves his elder brother's house to go out as a sadhu somewhere on the banks of the Ganges, because life meant little to him and he did not want to be a burden to his brother and his wife. In *Sianapan* (Worldly Wisdom), the stories are longer, less tendentious, portraying mostly the hardships and misfortunes of people in feudal society, especially women, who yet refuse to go under but live bravely, as in "Budh Suhagan" (Enjoying Wedded Happiness upto Old Age), a story of two women who lose their husbands when quite young but live to nurture their sons till they grow up to set the families on their feat again. The son of the peasant woman becomes a military officer and that of the other grows up to resume his father's acrobat profession to the delight of the family's peasant patrons, and "Puttar ki Bhra" (Son or Brother), in which a peasant woman still charming in her middle age gets her brother and son to kill the seducer of her beautiful daughter and manages to persuade the police officer to challan her along with her son but to leave out her brother. In *Abhagan* (The Unfortunate One), a young widow runs away with a young man but is deserted by him. She falls in love with another young man but is recovered from his house by the police on a complaint by her parents. She tries to find security with one or two men and at last finds it with a fruit vendor and adopts a child whom she presents to people as born to her and lives a contented life. The main point even in such stories is that there are people who do not accept defeat in life.

SSS

Kartar Singh Duggal (b. 1917)

An excerpt from K.S. Duggal's address as Chief Guest at the anniversary celebrations of 'Katha', an Oriya short story journal at Bhubaneshwar in 1990:

"Having been the author of some 500 short stories so far, which have been published in 21 collections originally in Punjabi, the short story seems to be the closest to my heart. But I started my career of a creative writer as a poet; I also tried my hand at

playwriting with a number of plays, both full-length and of short duration, to my credit. Evidently, my short story would appear to have ingested both poetry and drama. Commenting on my novels, literary critics have pronounced time and again that they tend to be strings of short stories, each chapter seems to be complete in itself.

As a literary genre the short story is almost the same age as I am. I was born in 1917. It was after World War I that what is known as the present-day short story came to be written and appreciated. It received a fillip in the industrialized society of the West, more particularly with the ushering in of socialistic values after the October Revolution. Of all the literary genres, the short story is probably the most democratic.

However, there is no dearth of students of literature who describe folk tales and mythological narratives, like jatakas and the goings-on of gods and goddesses as handed over to us, as short stories. Or at least as the beginnings of this genre.

Be that as it may, the modern short story is a highly sophisticated art-form with well accepted norms of form and content. It is defined as "an imaginary tale with a meaning, interesting enough to hold the reader's interest and profound enough to express human nature". It should not be longer than what can be read in a single sitting. In terms of time, it should take less than an hour, during which it should arouse, inspire, provoke and maybe amuse. A short story normally has a plot and a character or characters and a setting, apart, of course, from a well defined theme.

A sketch is static; a short story is dynamic. It presents characters moved by the plot. Length is not the only criterion which differentiates a short story from a novel. A novel presents a number of incidents and creates multiple effects. A short story highlights a single incident and leaves a single effect.

There are ever so many ways of writing a short story. It is a highly adaptable and elastic art-form.

I must have read not less than 1,000 short stories from all over the world before I took to writing short stories seriously. It is said that one must have a basic kind of competence and originality of perception and expression before one launches oneself as a short story writer. I don't know whether or not I had these attributes, but this is how I came to write my first ever story that figured in a leading Punjabi journal. I was hardly 17 years old then.

As a lad of five, playing barefoot in the Village Common, one day I felt thirsty and went across to an old aunt's house nearby for a glass of water. She had a visitor as old as herself with whom she was engaged in conversation. Before I finished drinking my glass of water, the visitor looked at me and asked my aunt: "Whose child is he?" She told him that I was so and so's son. He looked at me again and pausing for a moment said, "Hiro, with the passing away of the uncle, our relations have, in a way, snapped. Why can't this child be bethrothed to my daughter Biro so that the two families continue to remain as close as ever?" "Excellent idea!" was my aunt's response. At which the visitor came forward and holding me in this arms, put his hand into his pocket, took out a silver coin, and placed it on my palm. Thus an engagement was solemnised.

This incident remained carved in my memory as it were and one fine morning, several years later, on an impulse of creativity, I picked up my pen and recorded it faithfully underlining its simplicity, spontaneity and old-time charm.

As regards the actual act of writing a short story, what is commonly known as technique, I never bother about it. Every idea comes in its own form. I have only to arrest it. I believe that planned writing is, more often than not, pedestrian writing. What I try to ensure is what is known as epiphany—the moment of aesthetic pleasure, the moment when the reader comes to know the whatness of it all, the effect that seems to fade away into the quiet.

A short story has a plot. It is the means to keep the characters in motion and to ensure the reader's participation to the end of the story. My experience is that the plot gets woven while I am in the actual process of writing. The plot not only surprises the reader, at times it also startles the writer in me as well. A good plot is fun indeed. Sometimes the plot keeps on unfolding even after the act of writing the short story has been completed. Let me narrate another happening.

When the renowned Punjabi poet, the late Professor Mohan Singh, started his celebrated literary journal "Punj Darya", we undertook a tour of the Punjab to enroll subscribers. At Murree we knocked at the door of a prospective subscriber and explained our mission to the old man who opened the door. He listened and suddenly flared up. "Yes, you must come in. I was, in fact,

looking for you," he said, and then he shouted for his daughter: "Kailash beti! Duggal Sahib is here. Let us teach him a lesson." We were bewildered, both Mohan Singh and I. We didn't know what it was all about. However, he invited us in and, just as we sat down, we learnt that one of my short stories which figured in the previous issue of the journal happened to narrate what had actually happened to the young lady in the house. The name of the character in the story and the description of her physical attributes seemed to tally with those of her in every detail, with the result that the young girl, who had been employed as headmistress in the local Municipal School, had lost her job. Of course, I had never known her. I had never even heard of her. I assured the old man that that was so. As I said that, there was a loud crash in the adjacent bedroom and I saw the glimmer of a beauteous face behind the silk curtain who seemed to say: " I would sacrifice a thousand jobs to be the heroine of that story. Are you sure you didn't write it about me?" It seemed the girl had been cleaning a flower vase and it had slipped from her hands and broken into pieces when she heard me speak. As the old man went to see what had happened, we walked out of the house. On our way back, the young girl seemed to pursue me—"I would sacrifice a thousand jobs to be the heroine of that story. Are you sure you didn't write it, about me?" This incident led to another short story. It is called "The Story of a Story".

Characters in a short story must be in the sharpest possible focus; they must evoke the reader's sympathies as though by storm. The main character must be a live character, evolving and changing the way Kailash does in my story. Unless there are extraordinary and exceptional circumstances a character must not deviate radically from his normal behaviour. Again, Kailash is a case in point. The question is—how well should one know one's character? It is said that the depth of characterization in fiction is analogous to the degree of the writer's acquaintance with the characters in life. Be that as it may, my fictional characters invariably have a point of departure from the "real" someone. All my characters have a basis somewhere in reality and often enough I understand them better by writing about them.

Style consists in elements of language, word syntax, punctuation and so on. It is the author's originality of utterance. It is the rhythm of speech and thought-pattern. It is the richness of phrase

and symbol. If you have a character of your own, you will also have a style of your own. Once an anxious looking gentleman, a Maharashtrian, ran into me on the road and said, "I believe, you are Mr. Duggal. Do you know that the current issue of the "Dharmyug" has a short story evidently written by you though your name doesn't figure in it ?" Yes, it was my short story. My name had been left out inadvertently. The reader had identified it by my style.

Once a college lecturer from Roorkee wrote to me: "I have been reading you all these days. Never have I floundered in your writing. I did so in the penultimate paragraph of your story in the current issue of "Aajkal", just when the old man comes out of the room." It so happened that the editor had deleted a sentence which he thought was too bold for a government journal. I supplied the sentence to the reader and she was satisfied.

I believe, to be a good short story writer, you have to be a bit of a poet and a bit of a playwright as well. This is not to say that what can be presented in a play can be portrayed in a short story equally well, or what makes a short story can also be expressed convincingly in poetry. My well known radio play *Kahani Kaise Bani* (How Make a Story) occurred to me as a dramatic piece. However, I had those days a collection of my short stories in the press and my publisher found that they were short by one piece to make it into the requisite volume. Since I couldn't think of anything else, I rendered *Kahani Kaise Bani* into a short story and met the immediate need of my publisher. But the idea as originally conceived continued to haunt me until I sat down and wrote the play, which has been one of my most popular dramas on radio and TV. This is exactly what happened with another theme I thought I had done with after composing a poem. But it was essentially a subject suitable for a short story and I felt easy only after I had rendered it into my well-known short story entitled "Akela Kanwara" (The Lonely Bachelor). Some time ago I wrote a short story entitled "Chandni Raat da Dukhant" (Tragedy on a Moonlit Night). It is one of my most widely translated stories. All my friends, including Khwaja Ahmed Abbas and Ali Sardar Jafri, however, told me that it was a subject fit for a novel. Accordingly, a novel entitled *Sharad Punam Ki Raat* was built on it.

What a short story is about reflects the vision of the author. While writing a story, I am always conscious of the code of right

and wrong. I must punish the transgressor. I must promote the sense of morality. I stand for the coherence of the world which, in other words, means peace and amity.

My advice to prospective writers is that a story should be written the moment the idea—or its outline—surfaces in your consciousness. Don't ever wait. I have lost many a good story by postponing the writing of it. One must arrest the idea when it flashes across one's mind. As someone has said: "The moment the fiction juices start flowing one should make the best of them." There is such a thing as fever for writing and only they succeed who give in to the passion for work. Winter or summer, in town or on tours abroad, I am up at 4.00 a.m. and the first thing I do is to pick up my pen and writing pad. Inspiration is all right but one seldom achieves success without perspiration.

Titles of the collections of Duggal's short stories :

1. Swer Sar
2. Pippal Pattian
3. Kuri Kahani Kardi Gai
4. Dangar
5. Kacha Dudh
6. Ag Khan Wale
7. Nawan Ghar
8. Nawan Admi
9. Larrai Nahin
10. Phul Torrna Manah Hai
11. Karamat
12. Gauraj
13. Para, Maire
14. Ik Chhit Chanan Di
15. Sabha Sanjhiwal Sandayan
16. Mhaja Nahin Moiya
17. Sonar Bangla
18. Dhoya Hoya Buha
19. Ikaran Wali Raat
20. Tarkalan Vele
21. Hansa Aadmi

Anthologies of Short Stories :

1. Too Tibbe

2. Sil-Wattee
3. Meel Pathar
4. Til Chhat
5. Merian Sresht Kahaniyan

KSD

Mohinder Singh Joshi (b. 1919)

Mohinder Singh Joshi made his debut as a short story writer in 1958 with his collection entitled *Preetan de Parchhaven* (The Shadows of Love), and he has not looked back eversince, publishing eleven collections of short stories and a novel called *Tarian de Pair Chitar* (Footprints of Stars) in 1979. More important among his collections of short stories are *Dil ton Door* (Away from Heart), *Sonh Mainun Apni* (Swearing by Self), *Daropdi da Dosh* (Draupadi's Crime), and *Mere Patte Meri Khed* (My Cards and My Game). He has also to his credit an anthology of some of his best short stories entitled *Merian Shresht Kahanian* (My Best Stories).

Since he belongs to the legal profession, Justice Joshi's characters are clearly delineated, plots painfully constructed and the language assiduously polished. His dialogues are measured; the protagonists speaking not a phrase more than that what is absolutely called for. Most of his stories relate to the Malwa region with which he has a fairly reliable acquaintance. Professor Harbans Singh, the noted Punjabi scholar and historian while talking about him in his article "Modern Punjabi Literature" has this to say about Justice Joshi:

> Mohinder Singh Joshi, one of the more consistent and better known younger writers, explores the theme with understanding and enthusiasm. He can occasionally lay an edge of satire on his descriptions and has drawn with telling effect some memorable characters from country life. What, however, mars the total effect is his tendency to be carried away by his language.

The hallmark of his writing is preciseness of thought, expression and plots and those they are peopled with.

KSD

Santokh Singh Dheer (b. 1920)

Santokh Singh Dheer writes short stories as well as poems and is

equally adept at both. He takes his incidents and characters from the eastern part of the Malwa region and uses the eastern Malvai dialect (Pawadhi) with as much skill as Sekhon uses the central Malvai dialect in the dialogues of his characters. Among his most celebrated short stories are "Saver Hon Tak" (Until the Morning), "Sanjhi Kandh" ((The Common Wall) and "Koi ik Sawar" (A Passenger, Ho). In "Saver Hon Tak", Chanan, dead tired with a summer day's labour on his farm, can take little comfort during the night. The narrow courtyard of the house is too hot and close to afford undisturbed sleep. So Chanan and his family have to spread their *charpais* on the roof. But late summer also is the month of rain. The family has not had much of the night's rest, when rain-drops begin to trickle down from the clouds. They have, therefore, to bring their *charpais* down into the courtyard. The rain stops and the heat in the courtyard again becomes oppressive. They have again to take their *charpais* up on the roof. Then a shower again baulks their sleep and rest. This see-saw process continues until morning. The story may not afford any flashes of a social theory, but shows up beautifully the poor peasant's misery straight from life. "Sanjhi Kandh" shows, perhaps, an unnecessary resentment. Kapur Singh, a poor field labourer, has the misfortune of his house having collapsed in the rains, a house built on mud walls. He wants to re-build it with baked bricks but these walls will be common to similar houses of his neighbours which have not yet fallen. These walls have to be built with the consent and proportionate contribution of the neighbours. One of them, Kapur Singh's first cousin, Darbara, raises unreasonable objections so that a dispute is built up in place of the wall. But Kapur Singh gives Darbara the concession of making less than a proportionate contribution and agrees to receive repayment in instalments. The house is built and Kapur Singh is yet thinking of asking Darbara for the first payment of the instalment, when Darbara falls seriously ill with pneumonia. Kapur Singh goes to enquire after Darbara's health and large-heartedly gives him some money and goes to town to bring a doctor. Deeply touched by Kapur Singh's generosity Darbara confesses that he was instigated against his cousin by the Sarpanch of the village. Kapur Singh asks him to forget about it as such disputes are like the clang of vessels in the same basket. Now the dragging in of the Sarpanch is fortuitous, for such a dispute very often hardly needs any outside instigation. But Dheer wants

to make a point against the Sarpanch for his belonging to a superior class.

In "A Passenger, Ho", the situation is created by competition between the old-time tongas and the newly arrived buses. In the interval between the starting of two consecutive buses at the bus-stand of Khanna, a tongawala succeeds in collecting four passengers, one short of the tonga's full quotum. He goes about shouting to invite a fifth passenger who does not materialise until the starting time of the next bus, when the four passengers on the tonga leap down to board the bus and the tongawala is left high and dry. This is a typical situation created with the availability of a more comfortable and quicker transportation system. It is by no means a phenomenon of class struggle. However, the tongawala is the underdog deserving our sympathy. There are other stories of this kind, like "Dain" (Witch), about a woman offering magic nostrums; "Anhi Pihndi Hai" (The Blind Grinder), about the cruelty and cupidity of hospital employees; "Lutere" (Robbers) about small-town money-lenders, and "Sher" (Tiger) about a swaggering taxi-driver. Another good story is built around a cow owned by a poor family who has to sell it when it calves and begins to yield milk, to the utter disappointment of the children. Dheer has published four collections of short stories, "Sittian de Chhan" (The Shade of the Ears of Corn), "Saver Hon Tak" (Until the Morning), "Sanjhi Kandh" (The Common Wall) and "Sharab da Glass" (The Glass of Liquor).

SSS

Kulwant Singh Virk (b. 1921)

The pattern of Kulwant Singh Virk's short stories is very similar to that of Sekhon's stories. The central point of both Sekhon's and Virk's stories is to catch a moment, in which human tenderness is revealed not always by a dramatic turn of events but gradually and imperceptibly. Both are sons of small peasant proprietors, both look back at their early life when they were just schoolboys or college students with a tender feeling, which is by no means nostalgic. Particularly in the first three collections of Virk's stories the locale is that of his paternal village and its neighbourhood. (In "Ujar" (The Waste) and in "Chaah Vela" (Time of the First Meal—taken with buttermilk) he describes Punjab as a waste land

on which people grazed cattle for their living but when canals were dug towards the end of the nineteenth century this land became green with crops and the first sign of prosperity. Ala Singh is one of those born leaders who had settled in one of its villages along with others of his clan and with some families of artisans and scheduled-caste field workers. The whole village holds Ala Singh in great esteem and he is also truly a patriarch of his village. Ala Singh is very sensitive to his duties towards his people without discriminating between high and low. For instance, once while coming on horse-back to his village from the fields, he comes across a girl of a backward class family of his village with her husband coming to visit her parents. According to the tribal scale of values in these Punjabi villages, a daughter of anybody in the village was to be respected by every villager as his own daughter and her husband as his own son-in-law. Ala Singh offered the couple his own horse to ride, which they rode reluctantly on Ala Singh's insistence, who himself walked to the village and when the girl's father came to thank Ala Singh for it, he said that the girl was like his own daughter. Ala Singh had got a post office opened in the village and when a man from a Muslim landlord of a neighbouring village comes in to fetch his master's newspaper from the post office in his village, Ala Singh was filled with pride. In "Turi di Pand" (A Bundle of Chaff) Bahadur Singh is a leader of the Chatha clan. In this same village an armyman leaves his first wife to marry another and she is forced to go to another town to seek a job as a kitchen-maid. When Bahadur Singh comes to know of it, he persuades her to return to the village and makes arrangements for her maintenance, for she was a Chatha wife and her disgraceful condition was a disgrace for the whole Chatha clan, most of all for its leader Bahadur Singh. Balkar Singh in "Ulhama" (A Complaint) makes the Muslims of his village attend the Friday prayers in the village mosque. The most popular of these stories is "Dharti Hethala Bald" (The Bull Beneath the Earth). Man Singh, a military man, on leave from active service, comes towards the close of his leave to the family of one of his companions in his regiment Karam Singh, in another village, to give and take messages. He is asked to stay there for the night, is fed and looked after well, but otherwise he finds Karam Singh's father and brother taciturn when he speaks of Karam Singh. When in the morning Karam Singh's father accompanies Man Singh to the outskirts of

the village, where he would bid him farewell, the old man apologises for his cold attitude and tells him that after Man Singh had left Karam Singh in the cantonment, news of his death arrived home. The implication is that Karam Singh's father was carrying on his head a mountain-like burden and yet would not let Karam Singh feel perturbed during the night.

As against these idealistic accounts of the old village brotherhood, in 'Turi di Pand', Virk, a young man of Ala Singh's clan, finding himself unable to live upon the small holding that had fallen to his share, purchases a tonga to ply for his living. One evening Ala Singh finds in that young man's house two strangers drinking and eating with him and his wife serving them all. In the morning Ala Singh reproaches the tongawala for making his wife serve those strangers as if they were his close relations. The tongawala explains to Ala Singh that now when he was plying a tonga, his brotherhood consisted of other tongawalas of whatever clan. For he needed their help when something went wrong with his tonga or horse.

Another tender vision of the old ideal of a brother's love for brother comes alive in the story "Dudha da Chhappar" (The Pool of Milk). Lal and Dyal are two brothers living and farming together. Lal's wife always complains that his brother dominates too much over him, so they decide to live separately. One morning Dyal milks Lal's buffalo before Lal comes to milk her. When Lal finds that after a few ounces of milk in his milk-basin, no milk is left in the buffalo's teats, he spills a part of the already small amount of milk in the basin and coming to his wife, tells her that the buffalo had kicked and upturned the milk basin. His wife is satisfied and thus a developing quarrel is avoided.

In "Chacha" (Uncle), Virk opens another account of human deprivation in Punjabi rural society where women being less in number than men, many men cannot find wives. Bal Singh is such an unfortunate whom the narrator calls uncle. Bal Singh grazes buffaloes all day long, addresses them by human names as if they were his women and children. Or when he goes to a fair, he returns with some sweets tied in a part of his wrap to distribute to other children who call him uncle and this is just to impress their mothers. When the narrator visits the village after several years in the army he finds Bal Singh ill in bed. Bal Singh immediately asks for some whisky which the officer must have brought with him.

He is given a glass and smacks his lips after drinking it. Then he complains that the officer should have brought for him a *chachi* (aunt) forcibly lifting someone and pulling her in his jeep. Nobody would have opposed him. The narrator consoles him by saying that on his next visit home he would bring one. Of course Bal Singh knows that it is all in fun.

Virk has written many stories about poor peasants, like "Panjan Rupaya" (Fifty Rupees) and "Pauna Admi" (Three-Quarters Man). Similarly, in some stories he throws pointers on how even the middle class that takes pride in being honest also exploits those of the lower class. In "Begani Cheez" (Another's Property), the wife of a rich landlord scolds her young son for picking up a pencil from somewhere saying it belongs to somebody else. But she is not aware that the luxury articles in her house like the telephone and sofa-set have come from the earnings of workers that her husband employs.

Virk has in his own quiet way registered the progress that our country is making. In "Shernian" (Lionesses), he speaks of girls barely out of high school going to teach in other villages on a bicycle unafraid of any kind of molestation on the way. In "Namaskar" (Homage) a lady doctor voluntarily takes up a job in the country-side where she has to visit many homes. She says, "Sometimes I feel, indeed, that I am giving new life to village women, and setting an example of how they can dress as they like, go where they will, they are still respectable." The retired British major Millington, an old colleague of the narrator, gets out of his car and bows to that woman who represents India that is growing now.

In some stories, Virk has made allusions to the growing promiscuity in our country. For instance in "Main Hun Bahut Khush Han" (Now I am very Happy), a woman who is in love with an army officer and loves going to clubs and drinking and dancing, cannot marry him because of opposition from all sides. The man whom she marries later drinks heavily, comes home late at night and also beats her of which she complains to his senior officials in office, but when she is asked which were her happiest days, she surprisingly replies "the present", for she has a husband and children, she is an earning hand and is not afraid of the future, even when she is carrying on with an army officer. "Rashbharian" (Raspberries) is a dramatic story about a man who goes with a woman to spend a night in a rest-house and finds that the caretaker

innocently telling him that the child who on earlier occasions had to be given milk must also be given milk today. The narrator is stunned to get a glimpse into his own wife's counter treachery.

Virk has written some very perceptive stories about people after the Partition. One such story is "Khabbal" (The Creeping Grass) in which a Sikh woman abducted during the turbulent Partition days refused to come to Indian Punjab with the recovery officer although the house in which she lives is quite miserable. Instead she tells the officer to put her in contact with her sister-in-law who was abducted by someone in a neighbouring village, with whom she could claim some kinship. In "Murda di Takat" (Power of a Dead Body), Muslim soldiers of Pakistan and Gurkha soldiers of India are jointly posted at a check point on the opposite banks of a canal. For some days the dead bodies coming floating are all of Muslims so that the Muslim soldiers are crest-fallen before the Gurkhas when the two sides come together. Then one day the dead body that has come floating down is found to be that of a Hindu. At this Muslim Chhachhi soldiers look victoriously at their Gurkha opponents.

Virk wrote short stories about people and events in which irony and pathos are found in precarious balance, as "Gau" (Cow) in which a liberated educated woman often goes out of town to spend a night like a cow who is milked and driven out to feed as best she can. In another story "Papan" (The Sinner), a beautiful middle-aged woman tries to seduce a teenage boy with her ostensibly motherly attention. This is a favourite theme with Virk on which he has made many variations in his short stories.

SSS

Navtej Singh (1924– 1983)

Navtej Singh published his short stories in four collections, *Des Vapsi* (Return to Native Land), *Navi Rut* (New Season), *Basmati Di Mahak* (Fragrance of Basmati) and *Chanan De Bij* (Seeds of Light). He follows his father Gur Baksh Singh in his romantic sentimentality but is brought back from the brink by his acceptance of Marxist materialism. Among his sentimental stories may be mentioned "Bashira" in which the son of a poor village labourer who is sent for education to a primary school shows signs of a keen intelligence but his father cannot afford this schooling for long and puts him

to work to tend the buffalo they own. "Taamil Kuninda" (Summons Server) is employed in a court to serve summons on respondents or defendants. One summer day he comes to serve summons in a case to the main character in the story who has two children. Anything that is brought for the elder child, the younger demands the same. The father has to meet all these demands and he becomes virtually an obeyer of the children's summons. He thinks of the summons-server as his type, who is, however, paid much less for his services, a mere sixty rupees a month.

As a progressive writer, Navtej very often shoots his darts at the over-indulgence of middle class people. *Pahli Chumi* (First Kiss) is the story of a middle class man boasting of his first successful advance towards a woman. In "Basmati Di Mahik", a revolutionary poet of meagre means loves Sukhwant who is for the poet as fragrant as the paddy growing lush in her father's field, where he often meets her. But Sukhwant is married to an army officer who has no love for poetry or for the fragrance of paddy. *Bhagan Di Dor* (The Thread of Luck) pokes fun at fakirs and sadhus who mislead and exploit poor villagers by encouraging their superstitions. On the other hand, in "Navi Rut", he describes a struggle launched by the peasantry against their unjust exploitation by both landlords and government officials. The uneasy combin-ation of romantic sentiment and progressive, economic and political ideas makes Navtej's stories rather thin.

SSS

Mohinder Singh Sarna (b. 1925)

Author of as many as nine collections of short stories, including *Pathar de Admi* (Men Made of Stone), *Supnian di Seema* (Frontiers of Dreams), *Kalinga* and *Sundar Ghati di Sonh* (By the Honour of the Beautiful Valley), Mohinder Singh Sarna was recently honoured by the Punjab Government for his contribution to the short story in Punjabi.

Normally, the short story tells something that happened to someone. Old masters like Gur Baksh Singh strove for aesthetics. The new writer proclaims himself against plot, against character, even against meaning and reality. For the intervening generation the true reality of fiction is an imagined reality. The short story with them is light and deft, clever and feathery. They emulate the

old masters and yet at times they try and indulge in experimentation like the angry young writers advocating virtually a negative aesthetics. At one moment they are value-free, at another they abide by traditional morality and traditional fiction.

Mohinder Singh Sarna is probably the most representative of his generation. Sampling his collection entitled *Sunder Ghati di Sonh* that contains 13 short stories, one finds that each one of them succeeds in making a point that has a bearing on contemporary society. A retired senior revenue official, Sarna has seen the economic life of our society from close quarters. He is merciless with the new rich ("Do Rotian"), the hoarders ("Phannier") and those who indulge in adulteration ("Yogesh Mera Puttar"). He laughs at government servants who are mortally afraid of retirement ("Mattar Palao") and the utter servility with which they served the white rulers in their day ("Kale Ghulam Bagga Sher"). His short stories "Do Chandigarh" and "Sunder Ghati di Sonh" are fine pieces of gentle satire on our new society in the post-green revolution era in the Punjab. Sarna has also attempted to write an "absurd" story in "Gora Sergeant". Fortunately or unfortunately, it has not been much of a success, where the author can match the old masters at their best when he describes the subtleties of human behaviour and the nuances of finer emotions. His story "Phannier" opens with a haunting description of a cobra waiting for his male who has been delayed in the godown of an anti-social hoarder. Evidently, she had been a victim of the vigilance of the *chowkidar*. Notwithstanding the risk involved, the male goes in search of his partner and gives his life at the altar of his love.

Probably, the most sensitive story in the collection is "Mattar Palao" which depicts the character of a High Court judge who has just superannuated and seems to enjoy his retired life but the moment an offer of re-employment comes his way, he changes his mind and starts arguing for continuing to serve a little longer.

He has published two more collections entitled *Sooha Salu Sooha Gulab* (Red Scarf and Red Rose) in 1980 and *Kala Badal Kali Dhup* (Dark Clouds and Dark Sunshine) in 1984.

KSD

Ram Sarup Ankhi (b. 1932)

Winner of the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1987 for his novel *Kothe Khadak Singh*, Ram Sarup Ankhi is primarily a short-story writer.

He has a number of collections of short stories to his credit. Of these more important are: *Sutla Nag* (The Sleeping Serpent), *Manukh di Maut* (Man's Death) and *Kandh Vich Ugya Darakht* (A Tree Grown in a Wall). He has also published a couple of anthologies of short stories. His forte is the presentation of life in the Malwa countryside. His short stories have been translated into Hindi, Marathi and other Indian languages. His novel *Kothe Khadak Singh* is being rendered and published in all Indian languages. (See Appendix III—Translation is an Integrating Factor.)

A perceptive writer, his short story entitled "Apni Dharti" (One's Own Land) in *Rat Ka Kungu* (The Dot of Blood) would do credit to any creative writer. It describes the lot of a Hindu shopkeeper who quits Punjab fearing harm coming his way in strife-torn times on account of extremist activity and settles in the neighbouring State of Haryana. But very soon he finds that he is being woefully discriminated against. Says the refugee, "Rather than dying here empty stomach, I would go back to my homeland and if I must die I will do so full stomach living among my own people." He returns to the Punjab lock, stock and barrel.

KSD

Gulzar Singh Sandhu (b. 1933)

Gulzar Singh Sandhu has so far published four collections of short stories, *Husn te Hani* (Youth and Beauty 1963), *Ik Sanjh Purani* (An Old Partnership 1965), *Sone di It* (Brick of Gold 1970), and *Amar Katha* (Immortal Story 1979). With some stories published later the total of his stories comes to eighty. Well over one-third of these treat of rural life. His stories have very often an explicitly stated purpose. He criticises certain types of behaviour and attitude, without reservation of judgement. He condemns hypocrisy and narrowness of religious piety in quite a straightforward way. "Husn de Hani" the title story of the first collection, has a romantic sentiment. Four men of varying ages, some young and some a little order, are travelling down the hill country near Dalhousie when they come upon four young women planting seedlings of paddy, with their pyjamas tucked up to the knees, the whiteness of their lower legs augmenting the impress of their fair complexion, and singing as they are working. The fairest of them hardly past thirteen comes forward to accost them with an innocent purpose

and all the four ranging in age from twenty to forty are equally struck with her beauty. "Sit Pote" (Frozen Fingers) is the story of a robust young woman who is drawn towards a boy in his teens and one day insists on showing him her new bra by drawing his fingers under her shirt to have a feel of it, but her warm flesh receives only the cold touch of the boy's finger-tips for he is not yet up to making a proper response. In "Ghar Wali" (Mistress of the House) a young man is a frequent visitor to a friend's house who shows him great affection without arousing any suspicion in her husband's mind. She has a little daughter whom the young man cherishes with the same kind of affection. After this kind of friendship has lasted a few years "the girl grows youthful and begins to resent the young man's closeness to her mother and his visiting their house on even occasions when her father is away. The implication is that in early youth a person sees the motive of sexual attraction only too readily. Two other stories in his collection "Kaer" (Coward) and "Akhri Tinka" (The Last Straw) describe a woman's self-defeating acceptance of our male-dominated standards of morality regarding woman's chastity. In "Kaer", Salim loves her cousin Bano and proposes to marry her if she can get her mother's consent. But Bano has a sense of guilt for having lost her virginity through rape by a callous relation. Therefore, she does not accept Salim's offer. She is then married to a stranger of her mother's choice to whom also she confesses her earlier loss of chastity after having borne him two children. The husband has no compunction in driving her out of his house. She comes back to Salim and tells him the reason for her husband's rejection and offers to marry him. But Salim also has now no use for her. Similarly, in the "Last Straw", a Sikh peasant Chandan gave shelter to a Muslim young woman against Sikh raiders in 1947. Fatima lived with him and grew to love him, but then a canal was constructed and the best of Chandan's land was acquired by the Government. He felt miserable and disheartened and a further burden was put on his mind by his mother's attribution of this ill-luck to Chandan's keeping that unlucky Muslim girl Fatima in his house. Then a lambardar's son informs the Pakistani recovery force who come to take Fatima away. Chandan would not yield and his resistance is strengthened by Fatima's refusal to go with the Pakistani police. But just when the Pakistani police officer is on the point of relenting, Chandan's sister brings him the news that one of his bullocks is dead. This

was the last straw. Thoroughly demoralised, he leaves the village leaving Fatima helpless against his own mother and Pakistani police.

In *Ik Sanjh Purani*, Sandhu's concern for the social situation and man's reaction to it has become stronger. In "Jaman da Bapu" (Father of the Angel of Death), Gajjan Singh is a desperado, uninhibited by the weight of public opinion and common notions and taboos of morality. Not above committing petty thefts and even sacrilege and blasphemy against religious mores, he scoffs at his life. And at the end of the story as he lies on his death-bed, he continues to swear at death's messengers. His wife's grief is not unalloyed with a sense of triumph, as she wails, "Gone is my lion who would even mock at death's messengers." *Rohi da Rukh* (A Tree in the Wilderness) tells the story of Bakhtawar Singh who has served in the army, married and begotten five sons who have, however, all died one after another. Bhakhtawar Singh breaks down under this exceptionally heavy burden of grief. And when the author comes back from his place of service on leave to his village, Bhaktawar Singh exchanges common courtesies with him, not betraying any sense of defeat. In the words of the author, "He stands firm, though alone like a tree in the wilderness, with its leaves fallen, with its branches still alive with their sap. In *Dhanne da Chacha* (Dhanna's Uncle), Dhanna sells his share of the land-holding in common with his uncle and goes to England. His uncle has half a dozen daughters to marry for whom he is left with meagre resources. He then goes and occupies the place of a *fakir* of the village who is dead. One of Dhanna's cousins writes to him telling him of the desperate length to which his father has gone. Dhanna returns home to deal with the situation. When he goes to meet his uncle, the old man shoos away those people who had gathered around him and receives Dhanna in his arms. Dhanna is amused to see that his uncle has gathered in his hut a large heap of grain, as large as the richest landowner of the village would gather at the end of the harvest. "Muklava" (Honeymoon) is the story of another strong and robust peasant Malla Singh who cannot fully enjoy the embraces of his young wife because his mind is overweighed with a debt he finds difficult to pay. After remaining in the doldrums for some time, he decides to shed the fear of the moneylender and tell him he would repay the debt at his convenience. This decision rejuvenates him so much that he feels like enjoying a second honeymoon with his wife.

Sandhu has written some powerful short stories about the cruel happenings of 1947. The village of Dholewal is raided by Sikh fanatics and miscreants who slaughter the Muslims of the village sparing only young women whom they carry away to live with as wives of some of them. An elder of the village, Natha Singh, is sorely grieved at this which he regards as an affront to the elders of the village. About four months later one of the abducted girls Nasiro escapes from her captor Darbara Singh of village Saidpur to seek shelter with her old girl friend Tejo, daughter of Natha Singh just on the day when most of the villagers have gone to Sirhind to join the celebrations of the martyrdom of Guru Gobind Singh's two young sons in the Gurdwara Fatehgarh Sahib which stands at the site of their execution. Word is suddenly brought from the village to uncle Natha Singh of the imminent raid of his village by Darbara Singh and his gang companions to re-capture Nasiro. Uncle Natha Singh returns at once with the villagers and in the fight that ensues Darbara and his two companions are killed and the others run away. Uncle Natha Singh feels that the four-month-old sacrilege has been washed off and the honour of his village regained.

Sandhu has written some impressive stories about the condition of the people in villages on the border of Pakistan at the time of the hostilities of 1965. Particular mention may be made of the story "Apni Gal" (About Ourselves) in which Master Chint Ram, one of the visitors to the scene, finds some stray letters scattered about in the village lane. These describe the condition of these people in terms which seem to Master Chint Ram to apply equally to people on the Indian side of the border.

With such a variety of themes and rare perception of the human situation, Sandhu emerges as a major short story writer indeed. He is also the winner of the prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award.

SSS

Ajeet Cour (b. 1934)

Ajeet Cour, starting as a feminine sentimentalist, soon matured into a realist in a way uncommon with most Indian women writers. She has so far published four collections of short stories *Gulbano, Mahak di Maut* (The Death of a Fragrance), *Dhup Wala Shahr* (The Sunny Town) and *Savian Chirian* (Green Sparrows).

Like Amrita Pritam and Dalip Kaur Tiwana, Ajeet Cour also brings into focus in her short stories the unequal situation of the woman in a man-woman relationship. Her women are mostly those who have suffered from the under-privileged position in relation to their husbands as well as lovers. In both these conditions, she seems to project a woman's failure to find a home instead of merely a house. For instance, in "Ik Makan Ik Ghar" (A House and a Home), there was an emptiness in Gomati's life. But her husband does not have the time to provide it. "Before marriage in her waiting hours as well as in sleep Gomati had woven dreams of her marriage, of a home in which there should be the quiet and peace of a valley asleep in the arms of the mountains filled with the fragrance of roses, the scent of fresh grass, a feast of colours, the transparent beauty of a flowing stream... But she did not receive anything of this kind in her husband's arms and in his home."

In "Ik Pir Ik Pyas" (An Ache and a Thirst), a friend tells Nimi, "Nima, you are speaking of a house not of a home. May God make this house your home also."

The dream to find a whole and integrated home is connected essentially with neither a house of brick and stone nor one with the community of love, as with Gomati. Nor is it related to the problem of the material needs of a household. The first salient quality of this relation is that it is entirely free from the limits of the traditional pattern of Indian domestic life. For Ajeet Cour's heroine's love is neither as described in books nor the savage passion of primitive man nor a spiritual ideal. She does not separate sex from love. In "Faltu Aurat" (An Additional Woman)—*Faltu Aurat and Other Stories*—Gita tells the impatient and sex-hungry Ramesh, "First let harmony of minds come into existence between us. I don't need only a bed, I need a friend, a lover and a comrade, who should be my co-traveller to the end." After the physical relation is established, she says, "When I think he is my man, he should think about my grief and happiness, of all my problems... It is strange I am a very modern woman to look at. But inside my thinking is traditional, obscurantist, outworn and hackneyed." That a woman needs a man on whom she could depend.

This kind of man, not only the heroine of "Faltu Aurat" but all her heroines fail to find. In her novelette, *Post Mortem*, Mira says to Avinash in her thoughts, "Why don't you press me in your arms?

Why don't you put the wick of your breath in the lamp of my lips? Why don't you make my ribs creak?" It is not only a question of sex for Mira but of a partnership on a higher level, when she says, "When I sleep with you I will be doing you a rare honour. This will mean that I consider you my equal in respect of the higher values of my thinking."

Obviously Ajeet Cour's characters do not find this kind of all-embracing love in their marital relations or even outside marriage. But these characters suffer their ache bravely. They taste the pleasure of union and the pain of separation on a conscious level. For instance, in "Faltu Aurat" when Omesh leaves Gita to attend to his business in Delhi and then to go to his wife and children at Jaipur, Gita feels as if she were left alone on a noisy, crowded railway platform. Her companion has boarded the train and when it leaves, he has forgotten her "like a box or a bedding."

In Ajeet Cour's stories neither marital love nor love relations outside marriage are lasting. According to Sadhu Singh, one reason for such relations not becoming lasting in their lives is that the majority of her male characters do not have the guts to live in the present, they remain occupied in only making plans for the future. For instance, in "Khope di Thuthi" (The Cup of Copra)—the woman thinks of Rajinder's words, "We will work together, make a home together, will sow our dreams and reap their harvests together." In "Ikall da Rang" (The Colour of Loneliness) the woman remembers her lover saying, "For a year or so I will work hard... Then you and I will go together to some island and build a white house there."

In Sadhu Singh's words again, "Many of Ajeet Cour's characters try to cover their weakness by projecting conflict between their work and love." For instance, in "Ik Khat" (One Letter), Raju tries to cover his desertion in this manner. His beloved has proved her ability to be a partner in writing advertisements for the agency in which he works. But he does not accept her offer. As Sadhu Singh diagnoses, the reason for this coldness is that "most male characters of Ajeet Cour's stories consider women extras, as a doormat, as a side-business. The heroes of most stories in *Post Mortem* and *Faltu Aurat* are chips of the same block.

Pondering over this inadequacy of love Ajeet Cour best expresses it in "Dharti Mur Ayi" (The Return of the Earth). Does it mean the people do not love? People love only to cover up their

inferiority complex, their spiritual meanness by loving one inferior to them... And in this they satisfy their ego. They fall in love with one and another and then a third person and as this list becomes long, they derive satisfaction from its length. But inside them, a vacuum remains, a shrieking vacuum."

Ajeet Cour's short stories have been published in several collections: *Gulbano* (1960), *Mahak di Maut* (Death of a Fragrance), *Faltu Aurat te Hor Kahanian* (Extra Woman and Other Stories), *Butshikan* (Iconoclast), *Savian Chirian* (Green Sparrows), and two novelettes, *Dhup Wala Shahr* (Town in Sunshine) and *Post Mortem.*

SSS

Dalip Kaur Tiwana (b. 1935)

Dalip Kaur Tiwana is a prose counterpart of a Punjabi woman poet. The theme of her stories is the oppression of women in modern Indian society. Her women are either orphaned girls, widows, women married to selfish and cruel men or childless women whose husbands sometimes remarry and make their life doubly miserable. The women generally yearn for love or are disappointed in it. For Dalip Kaur Tiwana's women love comes only once in a life-time and seldom succeeds in fruictifying into marriage. These women lead a life of emotional atrophy and deprivation later. For instance, in "Das Varhian Magron" (After Ten Years), the heroine could not marry the man she had loved from her childhood and had in her imagination accepted as her husband, because her parents could not pay the required dowry. The young man goes abroad for higher studies and returns to marry another girl. But he is not happy with the marriage and takes to drinking heavily. Ten years later both of them meet in a train. But they do not have the courage to accost each other. Similarly in "Dhur" (Dust), Bibi falls in love with a boy in the neighbourhood but accepts marriage to another boy, suppressing her love for the first boy. In almost all her stories, Tiwana weaves variations on the same theme. In another story "Masi" (Aunt) Bali is left an orphan by her mother's death and her father re-marries, as is the custom in Indian society, her younger sister. This step-mother however, does not rise above the common level of step-mothers and ill-treats Bali even though she is her deceased sister's daughter. In "Kise di Dhi" (Somebody's Daughter) a young woman dies leaving behind two children. The

woman's mother gives her teen-aged younger daughter in marriage to her widowed son-in-law. But that man has married the young girl not for love of her but to ensure that his first wife's children would receive motherly treatment. She wants her husband's love on her own account, too, and not receiving this love she remains dejected and her youth fades. Her mother is pained at this and complains to her son-in-law that it is all right that his children should be well looked after, but what about this poor girl who is also somebody's daughter. In "Jhatkai Da Munda" (The Butcher's Son) the butcher supplies meat to a family whose daughter's love he tries to win so that he takes care to supply the best joints to the family. But the girl remains unimpressed. In "Tili Da Nishan" (The Scar of the Nose Ring), Tiwana suddenly becomes sentimental. A widowed educated girl does not believe in the traditional standards of life prescribed for a widow. But when on another occasion, she happens to visit in the company of her mother the shrine where a ritual is performed for the dead, she is impelled to perform it too. Even though educated the scar of the old tradition still remains on her heart. Tiwana's style of telling the story is conversational which in its contours and tone is femininely colloquial rather than literary. The points that she tries to make are rather obvious and except in a few stories like "Kise De Dhi" and "Tili Da Nishan" there is a lack of sophistication. The titles of the different collections of short stories betray this sentimentality; "Tratan" (Aches), "Yatra" (Pilgrimage), "Vairage Nain" (Eyes Full of Longings), "Vedna" (Plight), "Sadhna" (Austerities), "Tun Bharin Hungara" (Please Respond).

SSS

Author of more than 100 short stories, published in a number of collections and recently brought out in an omnibus volume entitled *Merian Sarian Khanian*, Dalip Kaur Tiwana's distinguishing feature as a short story writer is her uncommon approach to commonplace subjects and her severe economy of expression. She never uses another phrase where one should do. Even while talking about an oft-dealt subject like love, she decides upon out-of the way aspects of social life for treatment in her writing. It can be an attachment between a sister and a brother; squabbling, quarrelling every moment, falling out at every step and yet bound with the silken bonds of fillial love. "Veera" (Brother) in *Vairage Nain*. Or the mystical involvement of two sisters in "Kurlandi Koonj" (The Wailing

Swallow): Indira finds that Shashi, her younger sister, has taken fancy to Kamal whom she loves passionately. Only a sensitive artiste of Tiwana's calibre could devise how Indira resolves her predicament. Even when it is everyday infatuation between a man and a woman, Dalip's treatment of it is skilfully restrained and yet in no way lacks in emotional intensity or even the white heat of passion. In "Tera Kamra; Mera Kamra" (Your Room; My Room) a wall of bricks and cement separates two lovers who can never pick up courage to divulge to each other the goings-on in their hearts and are eventually reconciled to the fact that after all there was just a wall in between. Is it not a blessing?

The way Dr Tiwana probes into the mind of the girl who was engaged to be married to the martyr Sardar Bhagat Singh in her short story entitled 'Ik Kurri' (A Girl) in her collection Satyan Sai (They are the Satis) would do credit to any practitioner of short fiction. It is only a writer of Tiwana's sensibility and moral candour who could delve into the unfathomable recesses of agony and dignity, steadfastness and devotion of a young Punjabi girl, the way she does. The sort of character the author has painted, seems to outshine even the sacrifice of Sardar Bhagat Singh.

Dr Dalip Kaur Tiwana made her debut as a short story writer in Punjabi letters with her story entitled 'Maran Rut' (The Death Season) in the fifties. It is the tragedy of a lovelorn young girl Rachna who finds the rainy season much too infatuating to go to her college for studies. Instead she takes the city bus and goes to the town, a little distance, to meet her lover. It is still too early. So what? She is going to meet Arvind to whom she has given her heart. On her way she finds a bird hanging from an electric pole. She doesn't take notice of it. Arvind's apartment is not far from the bus stand. She climbs the stairs. She knocks at the door. There is no response. She knocks again. The door opens and she finds another girl in Arvinds' bed. "She is Sushma, a stenographer in our office... We were working together... It got late in the evening... I suggested to her to stay here for the night..." Arvind tries to explain. "My name is Rachna, Arvind's would-be wife," Rachna introduces herself to Sushma.

Undoubtedly, a consummate crafts woman, Dr Dalip Kaur Tiwana has emerged as a front-rank short story writer in Punjabi.

KSD

Prem Parkash (b: 1937)

Prem Parkash started writing in the early fifties and published his first collection *Kachkare* (Glass Beads) in 1966, and followed it with the publication of *Namazi* (The Reader of Namaz 1971), and *Mukti* (Salvation 1980) and a novel *Dastavez* (Documents) in 1976. The stories in the first two collections are perhaps a little more subtle than is common. One reason may be that as he is inclined to look at life without any noticeable ideological direction, the intent and aim of his stories remain rather elusive. He takes up complex situations which he tries to unravel, in which process the reader cannot quite follow him. Prem Parkash comes into his element with his third collection, *Mukti*. Perhaps the most remarkable stories in this collection are "Mukti (I)" and "Mukti (II)" and "Deadline". The last is the story of a problem peculiar to a married woman, Sushma, who has come after marriage into a house where the mother-in-law is already dead and the father-in-law is a paralytic. In looking after the ordinary comforts of this paralytic, she has to perform some rather awkward jobs like washing his private parts. But this is not all. The deadline comes when she has to deal with a young brother-in-law Satpal, who is suffering from cancer and knows that he has only a short time to live. He wants to enjoy the pleasures of this life as far as possible during the short term he expects to live. He was a boy of four or five when Sushma came as the young wife of his elder brother, Anand. As he was motherless he was symbolically placed into his grown-up sister-in-law's lap, indicating that she was to serve him for a mother. But with the all round attention and affection that she gives him, the boy is encouraged to demand more and more, so that she has to establish even a sexual relationship with him. Thus the boy who started as symbolically her son, and then her brother-in-law becomes also her lover, a few months before his death. She does not know where she crossed the border in her relationship with him and is obliged to ask herself, "Was I a mother, a sister, a mistress or a wife to him?" The two stories entitled "Mukti" also refer intrinsically to a deadline in human relations. Sushma, a highly educated woman, is married to Rajinder but is not quite happy with him. She develops adulterous relations with Professor Verma but this only adds to her mental restlessness. In this state of dissatisfaction she goes in the company of her lover to visit a sadhu's Ashram.

Under the influence of the sadhu's teachings she takes to sitting in *samadhi* and thus achieves freedom from the cares of this world. But this contemplation does not satisfy her. Sexual pleasure with her lover gives her a strange kind of peace. However this also is shaken when she remembers the sadhu's words that sexual indulgence is a distorted kind of pleasure. Thus she returns from this outing to her home again. In "Mukti (II)" she is shown as a patient of cancer in an advanced stage, when nobody wants to wait upon her, even to touch her. Even when her lover Professor Verma comes to see her, he sits apart in a chair and strokes her arm for the sake of form. Thus these two stories take the characters to a deadline mentally and spiritually. The three stories "Ghar" (Homes), "Goi" (Pudding) and "Bangla" (Bungalow) relate the tension created in cases of inter-caste marriages. In "Ghar", Rita of the Brahmin caste, highly educated, marries a Jat officer, Suhel Singh Bhullar, against the wishes of her father. The culture and background of the two families are so different that for all her high education and outwardly happy married life with children, she is beset with an inexplicable dissatisfaction.

In "Goi" Captain Bakhtawar Singh Bhullar, a Jat, marries Balwinder, daughter of Major Arora. Belonging to an ordinary Jat family, Captain Bhuller is beset with an inferiority complex, while Balwinder's parents take comfort in the hope that their son-in-law will rise to a high rank in the army and their girl will have a happy life and her husband will always respect her. The ancestral land is sold away to build a house in the town according to Balvinder's taste. But when Captain Bhuller's father comes, after his wife's death to live with his son and daughter-in-law, Balwinder cannot accept him as a member of the family. Captain Bhullar bears with all this but feels like a man who has no past. When on the birthday of his grandson, Captain Bhullar's father expresses his preference for a rustic kind of flour pudding, Balwinder cannot help expressing her contempt.

In "Bangla" the situation of "Goi" is repeated. B.S. Gill, a sub-divisional magistrate and a Jat with a rural background, marries Sonia, an urbanite who is employed as the district industries officer. She does not like the rustic ways of her husband, who would eat on a cot, break an onion with a blow of his fist, ask his rural guests whether there have been good rains in their villages. But the relieving factor is that Sonia loves her husband and whenever

some kind of tension arises between them, she finds relief in love-play with him.

"Machhi" (Fish) is the story of a young woman, Shil, who joins a group of Naxalites. Her husband is an agent of a firm and generally lives away from his house and they have two children. For all her free thinking she is attracted towards Vishnu, who is a man of traditional religious views. As a Naxalite she is attracted towards Nirmal, an underground worker. He wants to establish sexual relations with Shil which she is unable to accept, just because she considers such a relation to be grossly immoral. As a Naxalite she has to go to jail and after coming out of it she is a broken woman and says, "During my term in jail I have felt that apart from the discomfort of economic poverty, a woman has to suffer in her own peculiar way also. A woman is exploited in two ways in the houses of comrades."

The hero of "Main Tuhade Vichon Han" (I am From Amongst You) is an ex-Communist who has joined State service on the officer level. This makes his position dubious. He pays subscriptions to Communist comrades but has often to act against the interests of the party. So he is always apologetic in his behaviour towards the Communists and in assuring them that he is from amongst them.

In other stories also, like "Pare di Pakar" (The Hold of Quick-silver), "Lachhmi" and "Khun Baha" (The Price of Blood), the author brings his characters to a deadline, which they find hard to cross.

Indeed Prem Parkash finds himself treading a deadline. He is impelled by a revolutionary feeling but cannot forget his own middle-class background. Thus there is an unsparing, even cruel irony in his stories.

SSS

Chandan Negi (b. 1937)

A housewife with children, simple and unsophisticated, without much formal education, Chandan Negi has emerged as a front-rank short story writer in Punjabi in a matter of a few years. Her latest collection of short stories is entitled *Sagal Sang* (Altogether). Her earlier collections are: *Mera Pyar Mod De* (Give My Love Back to Me), *Chitragupta* (The Reckoner) and *Karva Sar* (The Bitter

Truth), *Gandh Kathoori* (Fragrance) and *Bar-Paraye* (At Others' Door). She has also a novel *Jal Bin Kumbh* (A Pitcher without Water) to her credit. She wields her pen with the assuredness unknown to a newcomer. Her stories are well chiselled, sharp in their contours creating a gossamer charm of their own. And what she says shows a maturity of outlook on life far beyond her years.

Unlike her other contemporary women writers, she does not talk about a man in a woman's life alone. She touches a variety of themes evincing interest in the have-nots in her society ("Band Gali da Mod"), her condemnation of the hypocrisy around her, particularly among those with vested interests ("Gandh Kathoori"), the pangs of the Partition of the country ("Free Hand"), etc.

She has authored six collections of short stories, compiled a selection of Dogri short stories entitled *Tawi de Kandhe Kandhe* (On the Banks of the Tawi), "Short stories seem to chase me", says Chandan Negi, still not believing that she has written these stories herself. "It is as if..."

She honestly believes that it is her father, who was also a writer, who is fulfilling his ambition through her. He has now established himself as a short story writer which he could not during his life-time. In fact, he did not have a single collection of short stories to his credit when he died.

"Ramo Chandi", the short story with which Chandan's latest collection opens, is the sort of piece which proves, if proof were needed, that she has an uncanny understanding of what makes a powerful short story. It is the story of a government servant who hates British rule and would like to make any sacrifice for the country's freedom. It so happens that without his knowledge, he becomes instrumental in Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose's escape from British India. The police, however, get to know of it and he is imprisoned for seven long years. The story tells the torture his wife and child underwent in his absence. But then the day comes when he is freed and the proud mother pointing to him tells her daughter, "Look Kanta, that man who is loaded with garlands is your papa." Evidently, she has forgotten all the agony that she had undergone for seven years when her husband was away in jail.

KSD

14

Drama

The Beginnings

Drama as a literary genre had died out in India with the death of Sanskrit as the language of secular activities. The modern Indian languages that emerged in the different parts of the country in the 10th or 11th century do not seem to have taken kindly to drama. Perhaps the temper of the Rajputs, who came to prevail over the whole country in this period, and their way of life did not favour the writing and performance of plays even at the courts. As the Arab scholar Al-Beruni, who came to India in the wake of the conquering raids of Mahmud of Ghazni, observes, "The Rajputs were such a vain people that they did not think the outer world had anything worthwhile for them to copy and learn and in their vanity their main concern with literature was to collect bards and poets around them to sing of their ancestors' glory." And there were so many of them in the sub-continent that the bards and poets did not find it worth their while to write anything other than paeans to the glory of their patrons. The common people had got so out of touch with Sanskrit literature that all that was left of the theatre in their midst was the legends about the great royal incarnations of God, Rama and Krishna, tales from whose life were dished out to them as theatre by wandering actors and bards. Of course, the same break in dramatic tradition during this period can be observed in the Europe of the Middle Ages. But whereas in Europe the renaissance of the arts gave birth to drama in the more advanced countries like England, France and Spain, the Turkish Muslim conquest completely annihilated the chances of such a revival in the Indian sub-continent, so that it was only with the British conquest that any theatrical activity came into being towards the end of the 19th century.

The Punjab was one of the most backward of the Indian provinces in this respect. The sole form of theatrical activity here was the skits and masquerades of street entertainers in towns and their counterparts in villages called *bhands* who had their own private scripts, if any, which they presented on festive occasions like marriage and birth of sons. Similar entertainments were put up in the towns on the occasion of Dussehra, Diwali and the like.

The rebirth of theatre took place in the 19th century first of all in big cities like Calcutta and Bombay. Perhaps only in Bombay was a commercial theatre evolved to provide entertainment to people in the north-west. These commercial enterprises were mostly the concern of members of the Parsi community who were not bound by religious traditions. They got scripts written by literary men in Urdu which had by that time become the literary medium of communication among the people of towns and big villages in the north. Their scripts were mostly adaptations of plays staged successfully in the theatres of Europe. Perhaps the only script-writer of this type who came to acquire a literary repute was Agha Hashar Kashmiri, who lived up to the twenties of the present century.

When literary activity in Punjabi began to include drama among its concerns, the first Punjabis to devote their attention to this genre were Bawa Budh Singh and Brij Lal Sastri. The latter confined himself more or less to the dramatisation of old puranic and folk legends, and wrote plays like *Savitri, Sukanya, Kunal* and *Puran Bhagat.* Brij Lal Sastri did not come under the influence of Agha Hashar's technique. His *Savitri* is the old puranic legend of a Brahmin girl whose husband dies on their wedding night, she follows him to the portals of the kingdom of Yama and succeeds in bringing him back. *Sukanya* is a similar story in which an aged Rishi Chavan takes a king at his word and asks him to marry his young daughter Sukanya to him. *Kunal* is of course the story of a queen of the Emperor Ashoka soliciting her step-son Kunal and on his refusal denouncing him as an evil designer. As a consequence, he is banished from the kingdom. Puran Bhagat is the legend so popular in Punjab with a similar content as Kunal's story and different in the sequel in sin that the betrayed and crippled Puran is rescued and cured by Gorakh Nath, and becomes renowned as a yogi. After many years, he visits his father's kingdom and blesses his step-mother Luna so that a son is born to her, who is known in Punjabi legend as Raja Rasalu.

Bawa Budh Singh's lasting contribution is considered to be his pioneer work in criticism, but as a pioneer of drama in Punjabi also his work, though less discussed, is perhaps of equal merit. He published his *Mundri Chhal* (The Trick of the Ring) in 1908, which is the earliest published original play in Punjabi besides *Damini, Nar Naveli* (The New-fashioned Wife), *Chander Hari* and *Udaini*. The first four are satires upon westernised young men and women. Chander Hari is a young man who has returned from England after being called to the bar. He wants to marry the young woman of his choice for which he has to wage a struggle both of wits and moral determination. In *Udaini* is tackled the problem of the backward tribes in India for which he has adumbrated a revolutionary struggle under a capable leader of the same tribe. He follows the manner and style of Agha Hashar in using rhyme to end sentences even of prose speech and interspersing them with verse couplets and quatrains, etc.

Bhai Vir Singh also published a play in the same style, entitled *Raja Lakh Data Singh* published in 1909. He wrote this single play of his in reaction to Bawa Budh Singh's play which he regarded as profane. In *Raja Lakh Data Singh* he has presented an ideal Sikh Raja who, guided by a saint, goes about in disguise to see for himself the various social evils and corruptions in which the Sikh peasantry and other classes of his subjects are caught, evils like drinking, lechery, indulgence in opium and other drugs, village feuds and litigation. The style is again that of Agha Hashar. Bhai Vir Singh did not repeat this feat.

Other attempts in this genre are represented by Gur Baksh Singh Barrister's *Brij Mohan*, Feroze Din Sharaf's *Hir Syal* and some others. Kripa Sagar wrote a trilogy on Maharaja Ranjit Singh again in the style of Agha Hashar. The first two parts (*Maharaja Ranjit Singh*, Parts I & II) glorify the military conquests of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and his generosity in dealing with vanquished rivals and foes like the Nawabs of Kasur and Multan, the Raja of Kangra, and his unsuccessful diplomatic attempts to win over the Phulkian chiefs. The third, entitled *Dido Janwal*, which is often grouped together with the first mentioned two parts as Part III, is in fact a glorification of the resistance offered by a chief under the Raja of Jammu to Ranjit Singh's conquest, and subsequent reconciliation of the Dogra people. Recently the first two parts have attracted much attention for their appeal to Punjabi patriotic sentiment.

Sharaf's *Hir Syal* is a verse-play on the same romance which forms the main story of verse romances written in the 18th and 19th centuries.

SSS

Ishwar Chander Nanda (1892–1961)

The modern period of Punjabi drama starts with what may be called a happy accident. Professor Edward Richards, an Irishman, was invited by the Dyal Singh College, Lahore, as a professor of English. His wife Norah had been associated with the Irish National Theatre in Dublin as an amateur actress. Her passion for the theatre impelled her to gather around her some students of the colleges at Lahore as enthusiasts of drama and theatre. She instituted a competition in writing plays in 1913 and 1914, in which Ishwar Chander Nanda participated with his maiden attempt in Punjabi, *Suhag* (Wedding), a one-act play which was adjudged the best and staged in 1913. It is the story of a girl of barely ten years being substituted as bride in the wedding ceremony meant for her elder sister of marriageable age who having refused to be coupled with the elderly bridegroom escapes from her home just an hour before the time fixed for the ceremony. This was later published under the more befitting title *Dulhan* (The Bride).

This juvenile attempt may have been forgotten like those of the others who took part in that competition, had not Nanda published his long play *Subhadra* in 1922. As a college teacher, Nanda had gone to England for higher education and was on return posted at Multan as principal of the Government College, when this play was written and published with encouragement from Sir Jogindra Singh who was then minister of education in the Punjab. Staged in a couple of colleges, this play instantly caught the fancy of audiences and became immensely popular. The theme of this play is widow remarriage which was considered in those days dishonourable and even sinful in middle-class Hindu families. The heroine, Subhadra, is a widow, a girl barely out of her teens and childless. Her mother-in-law subjects her to a cruel treatment, unjustly abusing her over domestic chores and even calling her an ill-omened witch who has eaten her husband, the old woman's son. Subhadra's brother Paramanand, a college student is affected by new ideas and wants to relieve his sister's misery by remarrying her elsewhere. A class-fellow, Sundar Das, sympathises with him

and offers to marry his sister. Of course, Subhadra is good-looking too, as such a person must definitely be in such a plot. The ceremony is secretly performed in a temple outside Subhadra's village home and Subhadra's parents as well as parents-in-law accept the *fait accompli* with evident relief.

Nanda turned to play-writing about a decade later when literary activity in Punjabi had picked up under new socialist influences. He published *Varghar* or *Lily da Viah* (Finding a Husband for Lily), published in 1928. Lily is the granddaughter of a rich contractor and daughter of a barrister of one of the London Courts of Law. The grandfather had arranged for her a private tutor, Jai Kishan, and as often happens, the two fall in love. Lily's father, the barrister is set against his daughter's marriage to a poor teacher, though the more liberal grandfather has no objection. The barrister also agrees when Jai Kishan threatens to make public the letters written to him by Lily.

The stratagems used in both these plays in the interest of social reform, are, however, not quite consistent with the idea of social reform according to which secrecy or threats of exposure are out-moded.

A few years later was published *Shamu Shah*, an adaptation of Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*, written obviously in conformity with the state policy of discouraging usury which was common among moneylenders who thereby exploited peasants and other poor sections of the people in the Punjab.

The technique and style of these plays are Shakesperean. Nanda intersperses in the main action of the play irrelevant scenes, songs, dances and buffoonery as comic relief to the melodrama. The influence of Ibsen can be seen in the fact that these plays are written for the purpose of social reform; they represent, too, conflict between the old and new generations in the resolution of which Nanda does not intend to overstep middle-class sensibilities. His style gradually gets free of Shakesperean gimmicks and becomes more and more serious and ironical in the way of Ibsen. His subsequent works, one-act plays and another long play, *Social Circle* (so named even in Punjabi) are subjected increasingly to progressive influences. Nanda has published over twenty one-act plays in three collections, *Jhalkara* (Reflections), *Lishkara* (Flashes) and *Chamkare* (Shines). They are all written with a purpose to dispel superstitious beliefs as in *Bebe Ram Bhajani* and *Jinn* as well

as *Dulhan*, or other social evils like economic exploitation of the working class by the employing class.

SSS

Sant Singh Sekhon (b. 1908)

Sant Singh Sekhon published his first collection of one-act plays, *Chhe Ghar* (Six Houses) in 1941. As its title indicates, it is a collection of six one-act plays. There is an allusion here to the classical division of Ragas into six *ghars*. The author means to present in these plays six events and to evoke a different tone of meaning from every piece. In the first play *Mahatma* (The High-Souled Saint), he develops the idea embodied in a saying that bread in a rich man's house has the sap of blood in it and that of a poor man's house the sap of milk, to suggest that bread begged or taken for nothing even from a poor home has also in it the sap of blood, the blood of those in the family from whose meagre rations the bread of charity is taken. *Puttar* (Son) presents a rural scene of a peasant family working and picking maize-cobs from the stocks stacked in the field, where they voice high hopes in the seven-year-old son who is a brilliant student at school. But at a little distance away, he cries in fear of two butterflies that seem to him to cross his way. In *Bhavi* (Fate), he mocks at the feudal over-valuation of romantic love which feudal chiefs regard as their privilege even in old age, suggesting it to represent the decadence of a feudal class like the Rajput chiefs of India of the Middle Ages, who fell like nine pins before the onslaught of the Turks. *Baba Bohar* (The Banyan Tree) presents Sikh history from the time of Guru Gobind Singh up to Independence. It is a dramatic verse narrative in which the chief protagonist, the banyan tree, relates the events as if it has witnessed them.

In 1945, Sekhon published his first full-length play, *Kalakar* (Artist) in which he shows the change in temper of marital life from the days of the *Ramayana* story of Ahalya's seduction by the god Indra and the curse that her husband Gautam Rishi pronounced on her, to the modern period when a woman (Ahalya) may get herself painted in the nude by an artist Indra and yet may argue it out successfully with the offended husband Gautam. Focussed on the nude is a discussion of ancient Indian and Italian painting and its projection into the modern age. After Independence, Sekhon has published three collections of one-act

plays, *Tapia Kion Khapia* (The Confusion in the Ascetic Mind) and other plays; *Nat Sanehe* (Dramatic Messages); and *Sunder Pad* (Beautiful Feet). The last is written mainly for children, giving an original interpretation to some old legends and tales. In *Sunder Pad,* a Chinese princess, who has got both her feet bound in steel according to the old Chinese custom and has therefore her feet of natural size considered ugly by the Chinese, is found for that very reason to be lovely by a Punjabi prince. An incident attributed to Maharaja Ranjit Singh's son, Sher Singh, is dramatised in "Pio Vali Ghori" (One's Father's Mare) who had taken his father's favourite mare Laili for a ride without his permission and was saved from the Maharaja's anger by his minister Fakir Aziz-ud-Din with a quip on the phrase. Another incident relating to Raja Ala Singh of Patiala is similarly dramatised in which Ala Singh is said to have inadvertently seen from the roof of his palace an artisan's young daughter taking a bath, and then to do penance for this unintentional sin, marrying off the girl as his own daughter. *Tapia Kion Khapia* is a presentation of another popular legend in which an ascetic is questioned by a young courtesan who proves to him the futility of an ascetic life to curb permanently the ordinary human passion for sex. In *Duja Viah* (Second Marriage), Sekhon takes up the inordinate vanity of mothers of young men becoming high officers getting them to repudiate their first wives and marrying for the second time to accord with the rise in their status. The young wife educated and confident of her husband's love mocks at her old-fashioned mother-in-law's customary threats and the tables are turned on her when she receives a letter from her own daughter to the effect that her son-in-law threatens to remarry, though the author is careful enough to indicate that this was not a real threat and was interposed in the daughter's letter mockingly by her husband. *Suneha* (Message, 1950) is a wishful forecast in that a scientist escapes from a country which has prepared the atom bomb to seek refuge in the land of the people (Soviet Union), carrying with him the secret of preparing the atom bomb which lifts from the land of the people the threat of an atomic attack.

Sekhon has so far published eight more full-length plays. *Naraki* (Denizens of Hell, 1953) is an exposure of the life of the Indian trading class whose corrupt practices in business, smuggling and black-marketing intrude into its domestic life in the form of sexual

intrigues by their women to checkmate their husbands morally and also to save them from the clutches of law. *Bhu Dan* (Donation of Land) is a satire on the movement for voluntary donations of their surplus lands by the landlords started by Vinoba Bhave. The satire is not quite successful dramatically. *Waris,* published in 1953 dramatises a story perhaps, apocryphal, of the love of the famous poet Waris Shah for Bhag Bhari (parallel to the love story of Heer and Ranjha celebrated by the poet) is related to the struggle of the Sikhs against the Mughals in its ups and downs in which the Sikhs are indicated as heirs (Waris) to the Mughals *viz-a-viz* Punjab. In 1954 were published two more plays relating to Sikh history, *Bera Bandh No Sakio* (Unable to Weather the Storm) dramatises the unhappy struggle of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's second son, Sher Singh, to control the situation in the Punjab and his assassination by a collateral Sardar Ajit Singh Sandhanwalia. *Moyan Sar Na Kai* is similarly a dramatisation of the cruel fate of Maharaja Dalip Singh, the youngest son of Maharaja Ranjit Singh who had been made to abdicate by the British conquerors and who wanted in his later life to win back the kingdom of Punjab by means which were most inadequate for the purpose. The title taken from a hymn of Guru Nanak condemning the Afghan rulers of India for failure to defend their empire from Babar the Mughal, intends to convey that the Sikh ruling class was too decadent to know what they had lost in the shape of an independent sovereign state and then how it could be regained. *Damayanti* published in 1960 is a retelling of the *Mahabharata* legend of Nal and Damayanti in which Raja Nal has to contend with gods Indra (Rain), Agni(Fire) and Varuna (Air) for the hand of princess Damayanti. Sekhon gives the legend the meaning that man (Nal) has to battle with the forces of nature (Rain, Fire and Air) for the possession of the earth (Damayanti). *Syalan di Nadhi* (The Young Woman of the Syals) is a version in prose of the famous legend of Heer and Ranjha. In his realistic zeal, Sekhon makes the characters speak in the dialect of Jhang. He also drops out the incidents of Ranjha going to a monastery to become a yogi as unnecessary in order to go to Heer at her husband's place Khera, and that of the burning of the city of Kabula as a divine curse for the Kazi's judgement against Ranjha. Sekhon upholds the Kazi's judgement as a realistic conclusion to the story.

Mitter Piara (Dear Friend), winner of the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1971, takes up the various groups of Indian revolutionaries

living in Kabul, Germany, the USA and Mexico before 1914, all counting on Germany's victory over Britain to bring about Indian freedom. The adverse conclusion of the war in the victory of the British, having dashed their hopes, they all repair to Moscow in 1922 to seek guidelines and help from Lenin, who is their 'dear friend' in the hour of their utter defeat and frustration. They also present a parallel to the three Magi travelling from three directions to Bethlehem, Jerusalem, on the occasion of the birth of Christ. Two of these bands headed by Obedullah (from Kabul) and Bhattacharya (from Germany) do not agree with the aims and methods of Lenin and return to their destined oblivion, while the other two, M.N. Roy from Mexico and Santokh Singh and Udham Singh, Punjabi Sikhs from the USA are accepted and trained to work from that base.

As will be seen Sekhon takes up diverse subjects, more from history and legend than from the contemporary period (more from the level of the sublime than the commonplace) with a rather intellectual bearing upon his themes, so that theatre groups in Punjabi are reluctant to handle his plays.

SSS

Gurdial Singh Phul (1911–1984)

Gurdial Singh Phul is the most prolific of playwrights in Punjabi. He has written over 30 full-length plays and a score of one-act plays. Among his earlier one-act plays, *Collegiate, Jori* (The Couple), *Sathi* (Comrade), and *Bhukh* (Hunger) may be mentioned. In the post-independence period, he has written *Adami di Akal* (Man's Wisdom), *Kala Te Zindgi* (Art and Life), *Dharti di Jai* (Daughter of the Earth), *Dharti di Awaz* (The Voice of the Earth), *Kalyug Rath Agan Ka* (Kali Age is the Chariot of Fire), *Lajjia* (Shame) in which he presents some social and economic problems of contemporary life. For instance, *Dharti di Jai* presents the problem of landlordism in modern India. Dhian Singh, son of a landlord, marries Rani, daughter of a friend of his father's, who has fallen in love with Dhian Singh for his anti-landlord and pro-tenant leanings. The play does not clarify whether Dhian Singh has become anti-landlord because of his love for a tenant's daughter or for ideological reasons. In the conflict between the landlord, Dhian Singh's own father and his tenants, Dhian Singh sides with the tenants. The landlord yields to some demands of the tenants which are by no

means revolutionary. But when the tenants do not vote for Dhian Singh in a panchayat election, he regards it as the tenants' ingratitude, and thinks of making over some of the papers favouring the tenants as against the landlord. His wife Rani shoots him to prevent his treachery. Here Gurdial Singh seems to support the Marxist view that it is difficult for the son of a privileged class to get fully de-classed.

Kalyug Rath Agan Ka is a verse-play consisting of three acts every one of which is a soliloquy of a different character. Jiwan's daughter is discarded by her husband and commits suicide. The widowed husband remarries Jio, an outcast who has been brought up by Jiwan's elder brother, Jawala. Jiwan kills his son-in-law, now Jio's husband. In the third act Jawala is shown repenting his activities and burning himself to death. The theme of the play is the miserable plight of woman in our society but it also implies that the end of evil is not always happiness.

In *Bank*, it is shown how parents regard their children as banks in whom they invest their earnings to ensure support for themselves in old age.

When Guru Gobind Singh's birth tricentenary was celebrated in 1965, Gurdial Singh wrote a play about Guru Gobind Singh's turning a rebel against the Mughal empire in consequence of his father's martyrdom. Four years later, on the occasion of Guru Nanak's quin-centenary, Gurdial Singh wrote *Jin Sach Palle Hoi* (Those Who Have Truth on Their Side, 1969).

After these centenary celebrations, Gurdial Singh's talent took a turn towards finding subjects from Sikh history. *Tatti Vau Na Lagai* (No Hot Wind Scorches, 1972), *Asin Du Savai Hoi* (We Grow Manifold, 1972), and *Nanak Nadri Nadar Nihal* (The Bestower of Grace, 1973) deal respectively, with the martyrdom of Guru Arjan Dev, the fifth Sikh Guru, under the orders of Mughal Emperor Jahangir, the oppression of the Sikhs in the 17th century and Guru Nanak's doctrine of Divine Grace.

SSS

G.S. Khosla (b. 1912)

A senior civil servant belonging to the Indian Railway Service, drama has been G.S. Khosla's life-long passion. Associated with the Little Theatre Group back in Lahore, he can claim to be a pioneer of Punjabi drama in Delhi after the Partition. He has

written a number of full-length and one-act plays which like those of Balwant Gargi and Harcharan Singh have been actually produced on the stage and have not remained imprisoned in the printed page. More important among his full-length plays are: *Buhe Baithi Dhi* (Marriageable Daughter) that deals with the institution of marriage in India which is undergoing change as a result of the influence of Western culture. *Parlo ton Pehle* (Before Doomsday) is another social play relating to the problem of population explosion. The play was staged in Delhi in 1964 and earned plaudits from the drama critics. *Shahr di Nilami* (Auctioning a City) projects the exploitation of the poor in the urban society in India today. A poor pan shop owner has to give way to accommodate a sky-scraper. *Mar Mitan Wale* (Those Who Give Their Lives), another full-length play by the author tells the story of two young lovers Barkat and Swaraj involved in the freedom struggle. The play highlights events from Quit India Movement in 1942 to Independence in 1947. Barkat would rather sacrifice his personal ambition of union with Swaraj in order that he could fully involve himself in his political pursuit; Swaraj, however, does not seem to look eye to eye with him. She believes that marriage would give impetus to their struggle for freedom.

Khosla has also authored about two dozen one-act plays which have been staged and also broadcast in the original as well as in translation. More successful among these are *Umidvar* (The Candidate), *Turant Lekhak* (The Instant Writer) and *Murde da Ration* (Ration for the Dead).

KSD

Harcharan Singh (b. 1914)

Harcharan Singh is the nearest successor to Nanda in both matter and manner. He started publishing his plays with *Jivan Lila* (The Play of Life), a collection of seven one-act plays in 1940. They are all more or less reformist in trend and treatment. For instance, in *Nava Chanan* (New Light), he pokes fun at the sons of well-placed families of rural origin, settled in town. Paramjit, a college student is betrothed to a village girl but is not inclined to marry her because she is an uneducated peasant girl. Another village girl, Paramjit's mother's niece Channi, uneducated but good-looking, comes on a brief visit to their house. Paramjit is attracted to her because of her good looks and absence of all make-up. One day

Paramjit's sister makes Channi dress in the urban manner and gives her a make-up. When Paramjit comes home, he is carried off his feet on being introduced to this beauty whom his sister represents as her college-mate. Seeing her brother devote so much attention to the new arrival, the sister discloses the reality and tells him that if Paramjit agrees to marry his betrothed, she will make her look as beautiful as Channi. In *Man Dian Man Vich* (Defeated Aspirations), Ambo, a handsome village wife, has a good-for-nothing husband Rakha, and is very miserable on that account. Suddenly, Rakha goes out to an unknown destination and there is no news from him for many years. In the meantime another young man of the village of good repute as a peasant cultivator is drawn towards Ambo, and the elders of the village agree to let them marry. Thus a prospect of domestic and economic happiness opens up before Ambo. But just at that moment Rakha appears from nowhere and all Ambo's aspirations for happiness are frustrated.

After an encouraging response to these one-act plays, Harcharan Singh wrote quite a few long plays. The earlier ones, *Kamla Kumari*, *Dur Durade Shahron* (Far From the Town) are rather crude, while *Raja Porus* is intended as a historical play about the battle between Alexander the Great and Raja Porus in the familiar sentimental vein. *Khedan de Din Char* (The Brief Period of Playful Childhood) is an enlargement of *Nava Chanan*. Two other plays of the pre-independence period, *Anjor* (Unequal Coupling) and *Dosh* (Crime), are quite melodramatic, the first, about unhappy marriages considered to be the common lot of artists and writers, and the second, the criminal exploitation of a woman and her daughter by a sadhu, thus bringing out the moral corruption parading under the veil of saintliness.

After Independence Harcharan Singh imbibed progressive influences and tried to reinforce this tendency by writing plays from the Sikh historical tradition. *Punnya da Chanan* (The Moon at its Brightest) and *Miti Dhund Jag Chanan Hoa* (Light Breaks Out Through Mist) are renderings of sentiments associated with the life of Guru Nanak. *Tera Ghar So Mera Ghar* (Your House is My House Too) propagates the idea of inter-communal unity in the shape of two brothers, one a Hindu and the other a Sikh. *Ratta Salu* (The Red Head Wrap) is a melodramatic attempt at condemning the criminal intentions of a landlord towards a tenant's daughter. It obviously refers to the tenant struggle of the early sixties in the

erstwhile states of PEPSU. In *Ajj, Kal Te Bhalak* (Today, Yesterday and Tomorrow), he tries to expose a corrupt and lecherous temple priest who dreams of becoming a minister and doing favours to the woman he fancies using some others as his agents, but he is aroused from sleep by the police coming to arrest him in a case of black-marketing. Harcharan Singh contributed his share of plays like many Punjabi playwrights in the celebrations connected with the third centenary of Guru Gobind Singh's birth by writing two one-act plays, *Itihas Jawab Mangda Hai* (History Demands an Answer) and *Chamkaur di Garhi* (The Fortress of Chamkaur) commemorating the unequal battle between the Mughal forces and Guru Gobind Singh having with him only about forty soldiers in which his two elder sons were included among the dead. The Guru escapes, undaunted and undefeated. The first-mentioned shows the Mughal Governor of Sirhind raving like a madman as the peasant hosts under Banda Bahadur advance against Sirhind to conquer and destroy it in revenge for the slaughter of the two younger sons of Guru Gobind Singh by the Governor's order. In *Kanchan Mati* (The Golden Earth), he writes of a young man becoming a successful film producer with the aid of a rich actress who becomes aware of the falsehood of her life and gives up her film career to devote herself to labour welfare work. In *Shobha Shakti* (Goodness and Power), he has shown woman as humble and admirably dutiful as a daughter, powerful as a wife and then defeated as a mother-in-law.

Harcharan Singh published two collections of one-act plays also in this period, *Murhke di Khushbu* (The Fragrance of Sweat) and *Panch Pradhan* (The Five Elders). True to his duty towards presenting contemporary history, Harcharan Singh has written a play *Jai Bangla Desh* (Victory of Bangladesh) in which he has presented the resistance of the people of East Bengal to the army of Pakistan as it was launched by students of a university of East Bengal. He dwells of course on the atrocities perpetrated by the Pakistani army on the people of East Bengal which became Bangladesh after the ignominious defeat of the Pakistani army by the liberation army of East Bengal with the aid of the Indian army.

SSS

Balwant Gargi (b. 1916)

Balwant Gargi started writing one-act plays under the influence of

the Preet Nagar School and later as a member of the Indian People's Theatre Association. In as much as he wrote these plays for the immediate purpose of producing them on the limited stage of the above-mentioned two associations, there is some obvious theatricality in them. Some are written to serve the propagandist purpose of the Kisan Sabha like *Mogha* (Outlet) in which the peasants do not allow the officials of the canal department to replace an outlet by a smaller one and court imprisonment in this effort. *Ghugi* (The Dove) is obviously a play for the peace movement in which a village moneylender and shopkeeper is made wiser about the peace movement which he initially regarded as prejudicial to the state and to his own private interest. *Bisvedar* (Landlord) is similarly propagandist in keeping with the aims of the tenants' struggle in PEPSU. However, Gargi's romantic temperament often breaks free of these limitations to make him write plays with romantic, poetic overtones, with some social purpose thrown in. *Kuari Tisi* (Virgin Summit) treats of the love of an unsophisticated girl of the hill region for the romantic and rich life of the town and solicits a young visitor from the town, who has come to stay for a night in the rest-house of the forest department of which her father is keeper, to take her along with him. In *Pattan di Beri* (The Boat at the Ford), a young woman is romantically stricken by love for a friend of her husband, a sailor, who has gone out somewhere unknown to her, so that when the husband, Sunder, returns one day, he at once senses the illegitimate passion in his wife's breast and goes back without speaking to her. *Bebe* (Mother) is the story of a peasant woman who is so ill-tempered that all her three sons leave her home as they grow up and she does not know where the fault lies.

Gargi is better known still for his full-length plays, a couple of which have been translated into English and Russian and staged in the Soviet Union, the UK, the USA and some other countries. One is *Kesaro* in which a young woman is deserted by her husband who goes out to a foreign land, and in her straits she learns to read and write and sew so that she can earn her livelihood. She earns the hostility of some people who have designs on her, and when after many years her husband returns home, they fill his mind with suspicions against her but in the end all ends well. This is of course a play suited to the purpose of the public relations department of a state. *Kanak di Balli* (Ear of Wheat) is the story of

the love of a bangle-seller Bachana for Taro, daughter of a widow of the water-carrier caste. But their love is thwarted by the oppressive passion of a landlord, Maghar, who persuades her mother to give her in marriage to him. But she escapes from her home at the critical moment of the performance of the wedding and plunges to death in a well. *Sail Pathar* (The Mountain Ledge) tells of a sculptor, Dev, with socialistic pretensions who employs a poor woman's starving daughter as a model of slim beauty and the girl dies after a few sittings. The sculptor's beloved Savira gives him up in rage at his spurious socialism to go out and join the labour movement which she says is the only right kind of employment for a socialist. Another brief play *Nava Mudh* (New Start) is about an old man who has married off his granddaughter and is left without any companion in his home. He feels desperately lonely until one day young playmates of his daughter come to play in his courtyard and awaken the love of life in him. The most successful of his plays of this period is *Loha Kut* (The Iron-Beater). This is the name given to the blacksmith Kaku by his wife and young daughter who hate him for his entire absorption in his hard job, so that there is little tenderness left in him for wife or daughter. Then one day the daughter elopes with Sarvan, son of a landowner and retired army officer. Santi, the mother, who had also loved in her youth a landowner Gajjan, who has pursued her all these years, is moved by the example of her daughter to revive her love for Gajjan. So that she also runs away with him. The play has been widely decried for its lack of moral concern and also for the alleged vilification of the blacksmith caste. However, by his deft treatment, Gargi has succeeded in making Santi a likeable woman instead of hateful for her ill-timed escapade. In *Dhuni di Agg* (The Smouldering Fire), Gargi becomes more existentialist. A young Indian studying in England marries an English girl, Linda. He returns to India, leaving the girl behind in England. Here he marries an Indian girl but the Englishwoman, with his child in her womb, follows him to India. When she finds him living with his Indian wife, she visits him in the absence of his Indian wife, entices him to sexual intercourse and when he lies tired and spent after the act, strangles him to death, because, as the dramatist puts it, she does not want to see his seed grow in another's womb. The play is well-written and brings Gargi back to the dramatic style of *Loha Kut*. Gargi is himself a character, mostly to comment on the

actions of his hero. But the play is too avantgarde, for the situation in India, both social and dramatic. No wonder, it has not so far been staged.

In 1969, Gargi wrote a play as a part of the celebrations of Guru Nanak's fifth birth centenary. The play is entitled *Gagan Mai Thal* (Sky and Earth are the Platters), in which he strings up different events from the life of Guru Nanak of which two stand out most prominently. One, when the store at Sultanpur where Nanak is employed as keeper, is checked by the Nawab of Sultanpur, on a complaint that Nanak when weighing out the rations, stops at the word Teran (meaning both thirteen and yours) because then he becomes attuned to God and has thus wasted a large part of the rations. But, when checked, the store shows every item to be more than it should have been, which fact is regarded as a miracle of God-attuned Nanak. The second scene presents Babar and his soldiers during one of his invasions. Owing to the ban on the presentation of any Guru on the stage, Gargi does not bring Guru Nanak on the stage, but for this reason the play becomes unreal, like just a commentary in the form of dialogues.

Another of Gargi's successes is *Razia Sultana*, the famous woman, who comes to occupy the throne of Delhi after the death of her father Iltutmish, of the Slave dynasty, because her two brothers are good for nothing. Razia gets them destroyed, but is then led by the common human weakness to love an Ethiopian slave in her cavalry. This arouses the jealousy of the Turkish nobles who were already chafing under a woman's rule. Ultimately Razia leaves her slave lover to his tragic fate and marries one of the nobles Altunia, the governor of Bhatinda. But even this marriage does not make her strong against the nobles and ultimately both she and Altunia are defeated after a siege of Bhatinda and executed.

SSS

Kartar Singh Duggal (b. 1917)

Better known as a Radio and TV playwright, Kartar Singh Duggal is the author of seven full-length plays and more than 50 one-act plays. His full-length plays are *Puranian Botlan* (Old Bottles), *Mitha Pani* (Sweet Water), *Kohkan* (Breaker of the Mountain), *Shaur te Sangeet* (Noise and Music), *Buddham Sharanam Gachhami* (I come to Buddha's Protection), *Ik Akh Ik Nazar* (One Eye Remains Unprejudiced) and *Mian Meer*. His short plays are available in a

number of collections including *Ik Cipher Cipher* (1 x 0 = 0), *Oh Gae Sajan Oh Gae* (There Goes My Love), *Tin Natak* (Three Plays) and *Sat Natak* (Seven Plays).

As a playwright Duggal has indulged in odd experiments in technique. Considering the conditions obtaining in the world of theatre, sometimes he succeeds while at others he has not met with much success. He has written a number of monologues that have been handled by eminent artistes like Madhur Jafri, Balraj Sahni, and others on the stage, TV screen and Radio. His play *Apni Apni Khidki* can be staged as well as broadcast simultaneously. In *Kohkan*, the full-length play, the same characters belong both to medieval times and modern times. The scenes keep on alternating between the two periods while the pace of the story is not impaired. The Shirin of the medieval age is in love with Farhad the artist who has been assigned the task of breaking the mountain and causing a canal to irrigate the gardens of her father; the Shirin of to-day is in love with Farhad, an engineer who is engaged at Nangal and Bhakra, the project which was going to usher in the Green Revolution.

Most of Duggal's plays have been written with the least number of participants so that they are easier to handle by amateur groups.

A number of his plays have been broadcast by All India Radio and Doordarshan in original as well as translation. His play *Dia Bujh Gya* has been translated and staged in various languages in the country. Translations of his plays have been published in book-form in Urdu, Hindi and English. Kartar Singh Duggal was honoured with the Ghalib Award for Urdu Drama in 1976.

KSD

Paritosh Gargi (b. 1923)

Paritosh Gargi, started his writing career in 1953 with rather long one-act plays, *Gaddi da Safar* (Railway Journey) and *Parahone* (Guest) and three more one-act plays, *Khuh di Man Te* (On the Edge of the Well) in 1954 and *Jagran* (Awakening) and *Nehle Te Dehla* (Tit for Tat) in 1956. Till now he has published nine long plays and two collections of plays for children, besides two collections of one-act plays. *Prachhaven* (Shadows 1956) contains the story of a trading family in which the head Kashi Ram and his eldest son Daulat indulge in speculation. The second son Ram is

educated but as yet unemployed. The third son Hansa is newly married. After the coming of Hansa's wife into the family, their business begins to decline. The family regard the new bride Shanta as inauspicious though Hansa is married to Shanta against his will. The educated son, Ram, does not agree with them but being unemployed, he does not wield any influence. On the whole, this play offers a strong condemnation of the system of dowry and common superstitions.

Chhaleda (Patergeist 1958) is the story of a wealthy trading and moneylending family. Lalu loves a school teacher Bela but preferring material gain, he marries Anjali, an intelligent daughter from a rich trading family. On the day of their marriage, Bela comes from Mussoorie to Lalu's house and swallows deadly poison. In spite of it the marriage party leaves to bring Anjali. One day Anjali comes upon a photograph of Bela in the house. This has a very adverse effect upon her and she begins to hate her husband.

Lalu is suspected of a hand in Bela's death and some influential people get him tried for murder. But Anjali, true to the traditional role of a wife, goes with the connivance of her elder brother-in-law Kalu to the house of Bela's parents and presents herself as Bela's old friend. Bela's parents are so favourably influenced that they hand over a letter of Lalu to the deceased which could amount to sufficient proof to get Lalu convicted. However, Anjali's hatred for Lalu grows so intense that she cannot continue to live with him and leaves the house.

Vagade Pani (Running Waters 1964) presents many incidents from the lives of a middle-class and a rich peasantry. The village headman Kunda marries a young woman Banti on the death of his first wife by whom he has grown-up children. The eldest of whom Harnami is married. She wanted her brother Pala to marry Banti whom he loved. But the headman has induced Banti's parents to marry her to him for a monetary consideration. Banti has smothered all her desires and emotions in order to live with her old husband, regarding it as her fate. In fact, Banti and her widowed mother were living with her maternal uncle, who was equally poor and he had taken five thousand rupees as Banti's wedding price.

An emotional tension of course exists between Banti and her step-son Pala, whom she one day reminds of their old love and tells him to leave the house for the good of both. The night is

dark and stormy. A flash of lightning frightens Banti so much that she gives a shriek and falls unconscious into Pala's arms. Right at the moment the headman comes upon the scene. He would have shot his son, had not Banti recovered from her fit at the moment and come to stand between Pala and his father.

Taraksar da Hanera (Darkness at Dawn 1960) presents the story of domestic servants with their own problems. The subject-matter resembles Gorky's famous play, *Lower Depths*, in that not an individual but the servant class as a whole is its hero. One of the servants Khamania describes his sorry plight and says, "I have performed every trade of a jack from serving the customers in an eating home, vending eatables in a basket on my head, working as a coolie and as a stone-breaker in road construction (Laughing). The likes of me are cheated everywhere and (Cynically) at last I have come to my first job at the sweet-seller's."

Kishania, another person of the servant class, has dreams of prosperity, but his employer runs away with all his collected salary. Ghisa is given counterfeit notes by his master and is caught and imprisoned. Toolu cannot bear his master's oppression and commits suicide. Santa, Bhola and Bebe are other unfortunates of the same class. The most telling effect is made by a remark of Bebe's, "It is a strange order, son, if you commit a minor offence you are a damned thief, if you cheat on a large scale, you are a rich man."

Kompal Phutti Lave Vichon (A Seedling Sprouts out of Lava 1968) is a historical play and received the Sovietland Nehru Award in 1969. The central theme of this play is the description of the political ambition of the emperor Ashoka, from the day he ousted his brothers from the throne after his father Bindusara's death up to the war and conquest of Kalinga. One of the players, for instance, sings:

In the whole empire
There is talk of death and blood.
On every side rise rumours,
Like foul smell from a carcase.

The emperor Ashoka himself deliberates: In the world of kings there are only pretence, extreme wickedness, war and blood. In the end Ashoka is shown renouncing the world and becoming a *bhikshu*.

In *Maha Achhut* (The Great Untouchable 1967), he has

presented a dramatic version of the moral philosophy and personal and domestic life of Mahatma Gandhi.

In *Patar te Parchhaven* (Characters and their Shadows, 1970), Savitri is dissatisfied with all worldly relations as between brother and sister and husband and wife. Her brother Kulwant gets her married to a worthless half-educated Prakash, for personal gain. Savitri's mind cannot accept this. The ever-increasing tension makes Prakash commit suicide and Savitri kills her brother Kulwant, who had incestuous connections with her and forced her to marry Prakash when she had became pregnant.

In *Luk Chhip Jana* (Hide and Seek 1974), the hero, Paresh Das, is doubtful about his own existence. He wants to end it but lacks the courage needed for it. He discusses it with his girl-friend Rina. The writer wants to suggest that like the characters in Samuel Beckett's play, *Waiting for Godot*, Paresh Das feels the absurdity of life but is unable to end it.

SSS

Gurcharan Singh Jasuja (b. 1925)

Gurcharan Singh Jasuja made his name as a playwright when his play entitled *Gaumukha Shermukha* won in a competition organised by All India Radio. Since then he has contributed eleven full-length plays notable among which are *Makri da Jal* (The Cobweb), 1957; *Kandhan Ret Dian* (Walls of Sand), 1963; *Ik Hero di Talash* (Search for a Hero), 1977; *Umra Lambi Daur* (Lifelong Race), 1981; and *Jungle*, 1986. He also has six collections of one-act plays to his credit *Gaumukha Shermukha* (Cow-face-Lion-face), 1955; *Char Diwari* (The Four Walls), 1964; *Pachhtawa* (Regret), 1965; *Aap Biti Jag Biti* (As It Happened), 1975; *Sikhar Dupehr Ate Hanera* (Mid-day and Darkness), and *Paras di Chhoh* (The Touch of Alchemy).

Jasuja's main concern is the projection of the contemporary social reality highlighting its oddities. While he conforms to the traditional mould generally, he has also experimented with technique in plays like *Jungle*. He is the recipient of several awards including the Punjabi Academy Delhi Award (1983), Delhi Natya Sangh Award (1986), and the Sahitya Kala Parishad Award (1988).

KSD

Kapur Singh Ghuman (1927–1986)

Kapur Singh Ghuman started his career in playwriting with one-act plays *Zaildar* and *Anhoni* (The Unnatural), which are realistic in a traditional way. But he soon began to write experimental plays, starting with *Jinodi Lash* (The Living Corpse) in which a model for the nude is presented as unemotional and cold. Thus it deals with the topic of painting the nude and makes a variation on Sekhon's *Kalakar* and Gargi's *Sail Pathar.* In *Atit de Parchhanve* (Shadows of the Past), he dispenses with divisions of scene and locale. The characters are symbolic and represent different psychological states with a philosophical background. A couple come to Srinagar for their honeymoon. They stay in the same houseboat on the Dal Lake in which the woman had given birth to an illegitimate child a year earlier and who was under the impression that it had died. But it had actually been rescued by the Shikarawala's wife, Nishat. Lalasa's dreams of the lost child are revived but when the child does not accept her embrace, symbolising the rejector becoming the rejected, Lalasa commits suicide. There are some technical innovations also in the play; the dead emerge out of the darkness and vanish in it again, the transparent wall serving for the backdrop signifying that the past is not shut off from the present etc. Also, the action is not broken up into scenes. In *Putalighar* (The House of Puppets), Ghuman builds an allegory representing life as a house and men and women as puppets. Seth Swaran Dass Maya Dass represents the power of money; he uses artists as puppets in furtherance of his money-making pursuits. The artist, Shant, does not succumb to temptation when he is offered ten thousand rupees to write a story for a film to be produced by the Seth. But his wife Kaladip is tempted to accept the offer of twenty thousand rupees to go to Bombay to act in a film of the same producer. There she is shut up in a glass case to be exhibited as a model instead, and a doctor is called in to turn her into a puppet. From this cruel fate she is saved by Colonel Zorawar Singh, who is attracted by her beauty and, confronted by the Seth's men, breaks the glass case. In the meanwhile, the poet Shant writes a play *Putali Ghar* which the Seth has agreed to produce. Shant, who has lost his memory, is invited to the rehearsal, in the hope that his memory may be revived on seeing the play. Kaladip is also invited, but in the meanwhile she has been told of

her husband's death in an accident. She comes to the stage and madly calls for Shant. The angered characters enter the stage through the wings and accuse the actor of misrepresenting them (an echo of Pirandello's play *Six Characters in Search of an Author*). The director puts them down by saying that it is not the actors who have to conform to the reality but the characters who have to conform to their representation on the stage, which suggests that stage representation is superior to reality in life.

Band Gali (Blind Lane) is an ironical presentation of modern day intellectuals. In *Bujharat* (The Riddle) 1971, it is not the theme so much as the atmosphere and presentation that are experimental. The characters emerge out of the waves beating on the sea-shore, where the hero, Beg, is waiting for his wife, Shirin, to join him after having performed her role in a play. The waves rise serpent-like and take the shape of a question mark before they recede. On the other side, the actress-wife is determined to take revenge on her husband who is a misogynist (a reflection of the Scandinavian playwright Strindburg). Shirin comes upon another actress protesting her love for Beg. In the quarrel that ensues, Shirin throws back upon her husband the cruel truth that her child is not his.The death of Beg after this blow is accomplished by making him advance to embrace an oncoming wave. In *Muk Sansar* (The Silent World) 1970, the four characters, Chhaya (Shadow), Suraj (Sun), Punam (Full-Moon Night) and Kiran (Ray) do not appear on the scene to speak. This is left to their counterfoils who narrate the story of their originals in monologues. This again is interspersed with flashbacks in which the originals speak and the counterfoils are frozen. The words spoken by the counterfoils distort the meaning of the words spoken by the originals. The playwright's intention is put in a nutshell when Chhaya says, "You traders in words pollute the atmosphere with your meaningless, empty and barren words, while the silent world of nature has spread a feast of unlimited beauty."

Azadi da Sapna (A Dream of Independence) 1974 is a satire on the reality of independence. *Nurjahan* (1977) has a historical theme, showing the Mughal queen's fascination for the most romantic minds in India. *Pani Ute Turana* (*Waking* on the Waters) 1978 is, as the title indicates, an ironical phantasy, while *Rani Kokila* (1978) is about a heroine of folklore in which the story is told in a dialogue between a pair of parrots, and folk-songs, dances and riddles are employed.

Do Jotan (Two Flames), *Do Murtan* (Two Figures), *Ghalat Kimatan* (Wrong Values), *Kach da Gajara* (The Glass Bangle) and *Dudh Dian Dharan* (Streams of Milk) are some of Ghuman's other one-act plays.

SSS

Ghuman was awarded the Sahitya Akademi Award for his play *Pagal Lok* (The Insane) in 1976.

Pagal Lok certainly merits the honour if for nothing else than its highly purposeful theme and its impeccable treatment.

The scene is laid in a lunatic asylum where apart from asylum functionaries, there are a number of mentally deranged characters including a writer, a political leader, an office clerk and a student. They appear to be conscious of the fact that it is difficult to decide who is mad and who is not. According to the writer in the play, everyone in this world of ours behaves like mad at one time or another whether in joy or in sorrow, out of greed or because of lust. And the rest of the characters agree with him maintaining that the machine-age in which we are living has made machines of all of us, our sensitivities have been dulled, our perceptions impaired and our ideals obliterated.

Opening the play on this Brechtian note, Ghuman proceeds in the remarkably deft manner of a skilled craftsman leading his spectators to realize in the end that many of those in mental hospitals are normal while quite a few of those outside are mentally sick. And the author achieves all this with delightfully witty sequences packed with humour which is spread out like sunshine over the canvas of the delicately fabricated drama. Ghuman is as subtle, as merciless with hyprocrisy and social evils afflicting society.

However, the distinguishing feature of the play is its technique. The author calls it a "producer's play" and indeed it is such. A mental hospital as a scene should be a drama producer's delight offering opportunity for presenting a wide range of behavioural patterns. An added attraction in *Pagal Lok* is the thought content of the writing, the wisdom couched in the dialogues of whether it is the author or the student, the doctor or the sweeper woman. The mentally deranged characters must be making the so-called mentally sound audience feel uncomfortable at every step. The lunatics provide a sombre commentary on the normal citizens around them. The dramatist spares none, whether it is a politician or a teacher or an office employee or a housewife.

The test of a good play is that it should be capable of being staged impressively. If it remains imprisoned in the pages of a book, it is a failure as theatre howsoever attractive the play may be as a literary work. *Pagal Lok* has been produced by various troupes since 1976. The play was published for the first time in 1982 after it had been tried and retried on the stage several times. Amongst its producers have been the Progressive Dramatic Club, Patiala, the DAV College for Women, Amritsar and the Akal Degree College for Women, Sangrur. The play has also been handled by a children's theatrical group which staged it at the auditorium of the Central State Library, Patiala.

KSD

Surjit Singh Sethi (b. 1928)

Surjit Singh Sethi accomplishes a commendable union of traditional realism and modernist experimentation. He started writing his plays in the traditional realistic style. His first play *Coffee House*, 1952 presents a picture of the higher middle class in the metropolitan and industrial city of Bombay, very bright and illusory on the surface but corrupt at the core. In *Kacha Ghara* (Unbaked Pitcher 1952), he has presented a story of youthful love which is stultified by the girl's wealthy parents because of the boy's poor economic background.

In *Kadir Yar* (1965), a young Muslim peasant becomes a kind of hermit, who takes to writing poetry. Kadir Yar's youthful love is rejected by his elder sister-in-law and out of disappointment, he takes to living outside the village on the family holding and writes the famous story of Puran Bhagat who rejects the passionate advances of his young step-mother, Luna.

In *Bharia Bharia Sakhana Sakhana* (Full to the Brim and Empty Nevertheless), Sethi has effected a change in his style and technique. The characters are shown to have come together in an open-air shelter on Sanjali Road in Simla. They are men and women who have collected here after a beauty competition organised with the intent of exploiting young women. Everyone of the men and women is bored with life and is searching for something that should make it interesting.

King, Mirza and Sapera (1965), is more theatre of the absurd. In his own words the characters are human in appearance but dogs inside. They are all fed up with life. They do not want to live but

do not have the courage to die. They go up on the roof of a high building from where they intend to leap down to their death.

Sultana, the woman character, also feels like killing herself but when she comes among the three male characters, she shakes their resolve. Later, when they see a newly-wed couple involved in a fatal accident down in the street, the miserable sight of their dead bodies frightens them so much that they just cannot commit suicide.

In his *Mard Mard Nahin, Tivin Tivin Nahin* (Man is not Man, Woman is not Woman 1969), the characters, as Sethi himself says, do not feel complete in themselves. The kind of life they lead has little meaning for either men or women. In an air accident a man aged about sixty-five and a woman about eighty-five are stranded in a wood. The man has a bottle of whisky which he offers to share with the woman. The woman tells him that hers was a love marriage. Before marriage, her husband seemed to her to be an embodiment of masculinity but actually he turned out to be impotent. She had a child by a friend of his. The man tells her that his wife had illicit relations with another man who turns up amongst them, pale with fear. He was the woman's teacher when she was at college. Ultimately, the tree under which they are all sitting happens to be a cannon ball and devours all of them. The tree is thus both a symbol of decadence of character just as, in Sethi's own words, in *Waiting for Godot*, waiting is more important than Godot and is both a character and a poetic image.

In *Nangi Sarak Rat da Ohla* (The Bare Street and Cover of Night, 1971), the title is symbolic of the theme. A woman, whose car goes out of order on the road at night, wants to utilise the occasion for sexual gratification with a young man in the car who is her daughter Rina's lover. She sends Rina to bring a mechanic who is the former's lover. In the absence of her daughter, the woman seduces her lover and sits behind him on his bicycle to go to his place for whatever pleasure he could give her. In the meantime the daughter seduces the mechanic whom she had brought. The approach to absurdity is patent enough.

In *Eh Zindagi Hai Dosto* (This is Life, Friends, 1976), the scene is a petrol pump where men and women of the upper class come to fill up their vehicles. A young man gives to his uncle, who is silent all along, a kind of introduction to all of them. In the end, all these characters are made to wear masks and dance. And then

they take off the masks and noisily insist that they should be beaten with shoes. This play is said to be in the style of the theatre of cruelty, promoted by a French playwright.

SSS

Harsaran Singh (b. 1929)

Harsaran Singh treads a new path in his first full-length play, *Jigra* (Tolerance 1958), in which a young man, Tarlok, is shown to possess the courage of forgiving his wife Rani for a sexual lapse before marriage. *Phul Kumala Gaya* (The Fading of a Flower 1960) deals with the improper reactions of her husband towards the liberal behaviour of an educated young woman. *Udas Lok* (Sad People 1965) portrays the sadness that is the common lot of the lower middle class in towns. The hero Shiv is disappointed with the ways of his kith and kin. His father and mother have been living apart from all their children for thirty long years, all the time quarrelling with each other. Most of all, Shiv is tired of his ailing wife, Shanti. He does not accept anybody's aid in getting her treated and when she dies, he himself does not accept the family's condolences. And when they would not leave him alone, he threatens to call in the police. What the play suggests is that life has nothing in store for men and women except insecurity, illnesses and ill-feeling.

Lamme Same da Narak (A Long-time Hell 1975) presents an aspect of the social, political and administrative life in our new democracy.

Nizam Sakka (Nizam the Water-carrier 1977) deals with an anecdote in the life of Humayun, the Mughal emperor who lost his empire to Sher Shah Suri. He was helped to escape with his life by Nizam, a water-carrier who gave him his water-sack to swim across the Jamuna when pursued by Sher Shah's soldiers. For this Nizam refused to accept any reward except the delegation of Humayun's dying royal authority for twenty-four hours. He is said to have had his leather sack cut into small pieces in which he got a gold pin fixed to make it current money. During these twenty-four hours the water-carrier issues some edicts favouring the country's peasants and workers. But as soon as Humayun goes into the safety of the Red Fort and Nizam's twenty-four-hour reign is over, all the edicts and currency of the water-carrier are annulled. The intention of the play seems to be to show that whatever concessions a feudal or, for that matter, the capitalist ruling class

may be obliged to yield under duress to the common people will be short-lived and withdrawn or whittled down as soon as the distressful situation is overcome.

Kulachhane (Bad Characters 1980) revolves round sexual relations of men and women in the present age. The heroine, dissatisfied with her husband's incapacity to give her a child, revolts against established values to get impregnated by another man. The husband finds it hard to bear this and there is a quarrel. A compromise is, however, reached in the end. This kind of compromise may be common in real life but is a dramatically weak conclusion. The central theme in Harsaran Singh's play is tolerance of the breach of the established code of morality in some exceptional circumstance. He has been able on the whole to play up the domestic problems of the lower middle class.

Raja (1981) is a historical play about the role and character of Raja Dhian Singh, the famous prime minister of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. However, though presenting Raja Dhian Singh in a less obnoxious role, it is marred by some historical lapses.

SSS

Ravinder Ravi (b. 1938) and Ajaib Kamal (b. 1932)

From Ishwar Chander Nanda, Punjabi drama took a giant leap to Balwant Gargi. It was then metamorphosed, as it were, for a little over four decades with Gargi's rugged characters and sophisticated format. The credit for taking Punjabi theatre to where it belongs goes to Gursharan Singh. He picks up his characters from every-day life, talks about what is uppermost in the mind of the common man and plays his dramas literally in the streets. That Gursharan Singh could make such a remarkable job of it he owes to stalwarts like the late Kapur Singh Ghuman and Surjit Singh Sethi who paved the way for his bold departure.

Another dimension to Punjabi drama is being added by Ravinder Ravi domiciled in Canada and Ajaib Kamal settled in Kenya where both of them belong to the teaching profession. With a highly developed tradition of theatre in the countries of their adoption, they cannot help being influenced by it and while writing in their mother-tongue, they project it inevitably in Punjabi. What they do not seem to remember is that to be called theatre the script of a play must be produced on the stage. And it is feared that the society back home is going to disappoint them. One has in one's

mind Ravinder Ravi's *Cipher Natak* and *Bhagiad Akhian te Dastanian Warge Hath* by Ajaib Kamal.

Be that as it may, it is not as though stray attempts at production of such plays have not been made here. Ravinder Ravi's *Chowk Natak* and *Beemer Sadi* have been produced by avant-garde theatre groups with limited success in Punjab and also in Bombay. But what scares one is the repeated sex scenes that figure in these plays as an integral part of the plot. Ajaib Kamal's play *Ghar Vich Bhagiad* opens with a man raping a woman. Similarly, his play *Dastanian Warge Hath* has a woman overpowering a man and then starting to undress herself, what to speak of young girls choosing lovers drawn by lots, or a mother and a daughter sharing a common lover without acrimony or fuss, the mistress making advances to a domestic servant and so on. The glorification of sex, drinking carousals, contemplation of mass suicides, threat of star-wars are some of the other features of these plays. The root cause of all these is the desolateness of life that seems to haunt both Ravi and Ajaib Kamal. It is perhaps born out of a sense of futility of life they are destined to live thousands of miles away from their motherland. Diaspora does work wonders but the consciousness of rootlessness can be frightful. Says Ravi:

> You cannot find jungle within a jungle
> The jungle has raided the town
> Whosoever has been born out of his own shadow
> He must remain unquenched.

Similarly, Kamal opens his play *Ghar Vich Bhagiad* thus:

> Is this a home or a desert?
> Is this a home or a desert?
> Every wall of this house
> Has the crack of a glass pane.

But what is reassuring is that while they continue to suffer from a sense of frustration, they are at the same time fully integrated with the Indian concept of man's destiny. Their plays, more often than not, end on a note of optimism. Love succeeds, goodness is rewarded. There is hope for man. Ravi's main character in *Cipher Natak* says:

> There is darkness in my mind
> But the candle remains lit.

And when he utters these words, the rest of the characters sing in chorus:

But the candle remains lit.

Similarly, in Kamal's *Dastanian Warge Hath*, love triumphs in the end. Mira says:

I'll now limit 'tarka yudh' to words alone
I'll now turn 'tarka yudh' into a lovely story.

Or in *Ghar Vich Bhagiad* the chorus sings:

Turn sex-act into simran
Turn sex-act into simran.

Their themes being what they are, both Ravi and Kamal opt for a poetic form of expression. And being leading poets in the language in their own right, at times one comes across some scintillating pieces of poetry in their dialogues.

Since their themes are out of the way, their imagery is fresh and their idiom is agreeably unfamiliar.

It seems both Ravinder Ravi and Ajaib Kamal are aware of the fact that their plays are far ahead of the theatrical tradition obtaining back home. They miss no opportunity to educate their readers and help them cultivate a new taste. Ravinder Ravi prefaces his play with quotations from drama critics and playwrights with a view to assuring his readers that they are wandering in no wilderness, that they are in respectable company.

Ravinder Ravi's and Ajaib Kamal's plays do make meaningful reading but when they will make their impact on the stage, we have to wait and see.

A few more words about Ravinder Ravi, who has carved out for himself a niche in Punjabi writing as a poet of dissent and is heading for blazing a trail in the world of drama.

Ravi has two distinct advantages over writers of his generation. Based in Canada, he is not conditioned by the physical limitations of the theatre in India today and he also does not suffer from the inhibitions from which the native playwrights suffer. He writes as the fancy seizes him, nurtured on the theatre in the highly developed society of the West.

Drama is essentially metaphoric in character. It owes its origin to religious ritual where it substituted a symbolic sacrifice for a real one. It is an analogue rather than imitative art. It can,

therefore, be poetic. It can present events that need not be contiguous in place or time. They need not be linear.

Ravi has, accordingly, done away with the unities of time and place. He is not bothered about the naturalistic fourth wall. His characters are not realistically motivated. The dramatic time in his plays is not indistinguishable from natural time. The proscenium arch, doors and windows and other natural features like furniture etc. are unnatural in *Chowk Natak* which is his fourth play. He takes pains to emphasize the metaphoric dimensions of drama. There is no stage as such. The entire action takes place in a crossway. There is no logic of cause and effect in the behaviour and actions of his characters. There is hardly any progress through time. For an average reader or the uninitiated audience, it may be scarcely intelligible; the playwright aims at offering only a metaphor of human conditions.

The action of the play, as mentioned earlier, is laid on a crossway. Among the characters are Kennedy and Regan, Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Napoleon and Churchill, Nehru, and Nasser, Lenin and Mao, in one scene. In another scene we have a blind, a deaf and a dumb wayfarer with a prophet to supplement them and make a whole. In yet another scene there are four mad men.

It is not without purpose that the action of the play is laid on a crossway. Ravi believes that man today stands on the crossroads. Every man carries his cross on his shoulders. Born on a crossway, one lives on a crossway and then dies there. Says the Sutradhar:

> Every individual carries crossway
> On his head and is lost
> Without finding a single path
> He is born in a crossway
> Lives in a crossway.
> And dies in a crossway.

There is hardly a man with his personality intact. Everyone around is shattered and torn to bits. Maybe we owe it to our origin, the original sin committed by Adam. We forge chains in which we eventually find ourselves entangled.

> Everyone is torn to bits
> Everyone is lacerated to shreds.

Even Adam and Eve who were at one time a single entity have

since parted company. They live in their own islands and suffer their own fate.

> Adam and Eve who were united
> Have since parted company
> They live in their individual islands
> And put up with their peculiar passions.

In search of adventure and sensation, man defies the system, finds pleasure in rape and joy in murder. The hungry and the have-nots become rebels and revolutionaries. Everyone is anxious to win the hundred-metre race and yet remains put where he is. Everyone knows how to justify his or her misdeeds.Everyone stands on the crossway, not knowing where to go. This is the predicament of modern man.

> Our culture, our civilization
> Our knowledge, our achievement
> Our beginning, our end
> Is a crossway alone.

Where do we go from here? This is the dilemma of man today. He moves but he doesn't know where he is going. He travels but he lands nowhere.

Ravi tells all this with the consummate skill of a poet supported by time-honoured moulds of folk-songs reverberating with their haunting melodies.

In *Adhi Raat Dopehr* (Midday at Midnight), Ravi has chosen a theme which lends itself admirably to the medium he has decided upon. While he still resorts to cinematic and video TV props, revolving stage and strip-tease, being aware of the limitations of the producers back home, he provides alternatives by way of symbolic aids to the development of the story. But what is more significant in this play is the author's faith in the new man, his capacity to solve his problems and usher in the new dawn:

> Let there be midday every midnight
> And a new dawn all over.

Ravinder Ravi employs an entirely new imagery. Ravi's similes and metaphors have a flavour of their own. There is a gossamer delicacy about his verse and yet it is most realistic, earthy and sensuous.

As a playwright Ravi employs his words with utmost economy and makes most dramatic use of them. At times they seem to be couched in action. They create vivid images of volatile activity:

> This done, that finished, there they go.
> This shot, that dead, there they are no more.
> Thoohthah!

A dialogue like this needs neither support from sound-effects nor any background music, howsoever sophisticated.

And those who go to a poetic play for the joy of poetry will find plenty of it in Ravi's play. It is because the theme he has decided upon and the characters that he has conceived to delineate it, must have expression at no ordinary pitch.

It is yet another attempt at search for his identity on the part of modern man. And since, as maintained by the playwright, there is both good and evil in human nature, he is what the new man makes of himself:

> Half godly and half satanic
> Are men of our century.

These writings by the Punjabi writers domiciled abroad are going to widen the frontiers of Punjabi letters in no uncertain way. They are going to have an abiding place in our literature.

KSD

Ajmer Singh Aulakh (b. 1942)

Ajmer Singh Aulakh has published three collections of short plays. *Arbad Narbad Dhundakara* (Aeons and the Nebula, 1978) includes five such plays. The title is taken from a line of Guru Nanak in the *Guru Granth* in which he has given cosmology on the lines of ancient Indian texts. The first, the title play, extends over two acts. Of its five characters, Ranjha and Mirza are heroes of love legends of medieval Punjab, Majnu of medieval Arabia and Farhad of medieval Iran. The fifth, Indra, is the well-known God of Indian mythology who violated Gautam Rishi's wife Ahalya by assuming the Rishi's form. The tragic end of these lovers is attributed to the social prejudices of their times. In the second act, he connects their plight to economic problems in the light of Marxist philosophy.

The second play, *Begene Bohar di Chhan* (Shade of the Alien Tree 1983), is Aulakh's most popular play. It presents the situation of a peasant-tenant Gajjan Singh, who is surrounded by protests on all sides by the members of his joint family. The younger brother and his wife want to divide the small tenanted holding, after which division of life will become ever more difficult for them. Old Bishni, whose husband and son have been killed in a feud, represents the Diogenic aspect of life. Kashi Ram is the moneylender who feeds as a vulture on these carcases. Pitu, another poor peasant, provides a running commentary on the situation with grim humour.

Ik Ramayan Hor (One More Ramayana) is a transference of the legendary situation of Lord Rama, his wife Sita and brother Lachhaman to the house of a small peasant (Ram) who asks his wife Sita to keep his younger brother (Lachhu) in good humour so that he may not marry and ask for division of their petty holding. Sita, in contrast with her namesake of the epic, agrees to bestow her favours on her brother-in-law.

In *Bhath Kherian da Rahina* (Living in a Furnace), Nirmal, son of a poor peasant, cannot go to college for higher studies and has to join the police force as a constable. The superintendent of police wants him to shoot a captured Naxalite, Darshan, who had been a class-fellow of his. He makes feeble protests but has in the end to obey his superior.

Sukki Kukh (The Dry Womb) consists of three scenes. Dhanno, the barren woman, is advised by a so called sadhu to kill a neighbour's child as sacrifice to the God. Dhanno would have committed this crime had the child's mother not come on the scene and dragged her child away.

The third collection entitled *Anhe Nishanchi* (Blind-shooters) contains five one-act plays. *Behkda Roh* (Flaming Rage) contains four scenes in which Bhagat the tenant and Madho, his share-cropper, find their situation so unbearable that they decide to kill the landlord and the moneylender. The play ends when these two appear armed with a lathi and hatchet, determined to kill their exploiters.

In the second play, *Anhe Nishanchi*, members of the exploiting classes are shown engineering communal killings in 1947.

The third play, *Sidha Rah Vinga Banda* (The Straight Path and the Crooked Man), presents criticism of civil officials perversely abusing their powers.

Rahgir (Wayfarer) has three characters, an old man, a young girl and a wayfarer, symbolising three generations toiling under difficult conditions for the attainment of new ideals.

Brahmabhoj (Divine Feast) is a new version of the well-known legend connected with Guru Nanak Dev. A child rejects the delicacies of a rich man as blood-soaked and eats with relish the rye loaf of a poor household which he describes as sweet as milk.

SSS

15

Prose

The Beginnings

With the dawn of the 20th century, Punjabi writing came of age. Foremost among the writers of this period is Bhai Vir Singh (1882–1957). Bhai Vir Singh's writing, whether prose or verse, is more mature than that of his predecessors. It has also a sophistication of its own though his approach is reformist, with even greater religiosity. It is, however, the volume and range of his concern that mark him out as the most eminent of Punjabi writers right up to the eve of Independence. He started as editor of a weekly *Khalsa Samachar,* devoted to religious and social reform and rehabilitation of the Punjabi language in the modern age. He has written both verse and prose extensively and has rightly been called the real founder of modern Punjabi literature. His prose writings include the accounts of the lives of the Sikh Gurus, *Guru Nanak Chamatkar, Kalgidhar Chamatkar* and *Asht Guru Chamatkar.* These were written in large part as articles contributed to the *Khalsa Samachar* and independent tracts brought out on various occasions, mainly birth and death celebrations of the Gurus and were later collected in volumes named above, of course with necessary additions to fill in the gaps in historical narration. As their names indicate, they are not entirely realistic accounts but are filled with imaginative dramatic dialogues and third person accounts with a copious interlarding of stories of miracles attributed to the Gurus in the *Janam Sakhis, Gurvilases* and the Sikh religious tradition, generally.

Bhai Vir Singh's language and style are full of sophistication, metaphor and simile and other such devices as would be considered fitting to devotional feelings and sentiments which the writer

intends to convey to the reader. The spirit of revivalism marks not only the content but also the style of these writings.

More valuable is Bhai Vir Singh's work of editing some old texts like the *Puratan Janam Sakhi* and *Sikhan di Bhagat Mala* in prose and Bhai Santokh Singh's *Guru Pratap Surya*, which is an account in Braji verse of the lives of the ten Sikh Gurus and is again a composite structure of historical narration and hearsay not excluding miracles. Some miscellaneous prose writings like *Devi Puja Partal, Hem Kund Yatra, Guru Balam Sakhian* (two volumes) and *Parchian* and *Sant Gatha* may also be noticed here.

SSS

Gur Baksh Singh (1889–1971)

Gur Baksh Singh entered the field of Punjabi letters like the west wind in the early thirties at the age of over forty. He had received his education in engineering in the United States and then served in the First World War as an engineer in the Indian army in Mesopotamia, now Iraq. Being posted in the North-West Frontier Provinces, he started rather unostentatiously by bringing out a Punjabi magazine *Preet Lari* (The String of Love) under the patronage of the Gurdwara of Akali Phula Singh at Nowshera. He soon broke out of the shell of a religious atmosphere and transferred his magazine to Lahore.

His earlier writings are in the liberal idealistic spirit of the American writers at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, like Emerson, Walt Whitman, George Barrow and Upton Sinclair whom he introduced to the readers of his magazine. He preached liberal social ideas and an elitist code of manners. Most of his articles in the *Preet Lari* were published in book-form every year or even more frequently.

What has appealed to most readers of *Preet Lari* is Gur Baksh Singh's non-religious, secular thinking and polite, refined tone and manner. He keeps clear of politics but does not fear to tread upon the toes of many religious-minded Sikhs, especially because he chooses to write about the Sikh Gurus in a style free of religious sentimentality and worshipful humility. His essays on such subjects are collected in a book entitled *Param Manukh* (The Absolute Man).

But what earned for him the great regard of the Sikh intelligentsia are his polite essays, published in volumes like *Savin Padhari Zindagi* (Comfortable Refined Living). Thus for a time

Gur Baksh Singh became a subject of contention between the educated Sikh laity permeated with Western liberal influences and narrow religious and sectarian minds. In fact, if he was condemned by one class of people as an atheist and anti-religious freethinker, he was admired by another class for the same things. But the character of the age was in favour of Gur Baksh Singh and his ideas and the sectarian obscurantist elements were disregarded. His writings of this period are collected in books like *Nava Shivala* (The New Temple), *Changeri Duniya de Teran Supne* (Thirteen Dreams of a Better World), *Swepuranata di Tangh* (Aspiring for Self-perfection), *Navin Takari Duniya* (New Strong World), *Bhakhadi Jivan Changiari* (Glowing Spark of Life), *Khulla Dar* (The Open Door), *Merian Abbul Yadan* (My Unforgettable Memories) and an autobiography in two volumes. Along with such essays Gur Baksh Singh gave to his readers three volumes of short stories, *Anokhe Te Ikalle* (Strange and Lonely People), *Bhabi Maina* (Sister-in-law Maina), and *Pritan da Pahredar* (The Guardian Watcher of Love).

In his later period, particularly after 1947, Gur Baksh Singh came under Communist influence. He stands unique among Punjabi writers of his time for both volume and quality of his writings, which have built him up as an institution. He has deeply influenced the mode of life, etiquette and manners, even the speech of numerous Punjabi homes in which he was loved as a father-figure. He was addressed as *Darji* (short for Sardarji) by his young admirers, which became a mode of address in numerous homes for the father of the family. He propagates the idea of love as a sentiment of affection and admiration, a polite, platonic ideal in which he wants all mankind to be united as beads of a necklace. He presents his idea of universal love as *Sahaj Preet* (Equable Love) in which there is no idea of possession. Love is not possession is his most vaunted slogan (Piar Qabza Nahin). Indeed he has imparted a new angle of vision to his readers and tried to convert the ugliness of uncultured lives into polite beauty. He is an inconoclast who has taught many people to discard superstition, outmoded customs, religious hypocrisy and obscurantism. He has all along been a rationalist to which mode of thinking he has converted a large number of his readers. And he has been always free of fanaticism of any kind and changed with the times. More particularly, he has been able to discard his earlier capitalist

liberalism in favour of socialist humanism. His greatest achievement is the creation of a reading public in Punjabi outside of religious circles.

Gur Baksh Singh's style is serious and poetic and at the same time philosophic and explanatory. His most remarkable quality is the polite, new-formed phraseology. He has constructed and popularised many compound words and phrases and has rightly been called a "juggler of words". In short, he has created a style of life as well as writing which has many admirable qualities. He has kept Sanskritism at a respectable distance and not hesitated to employ many Persian words and idioms popularised by education through the Urdu medium before independence.

He published in his last years his autobiography *Zindagi di Ras* (The Stock of Life) in two volumes.

SSS

Teja Singh (1894–1958)

Teja Singh did not write much in Punjabi but he set before Punjabi prose writers a model style in the way Addison did in English. He has done a great deal in refining Punjabi prose to give it a literary complexion and flavour different from the utilitarian prose which was written up to that time in books of a religious temper, expository and scholastic. Indeed he started writing in Punjabi with condescension when he was approached to write introductions and appreciations by young aspirants to literary fame as poets and occasionally novelists and dramatists in Punjabi. By training and profession, he was a teacher of English in which he had made a name as a Shakespearean scholar and a writer on Sikh religion from the liberal and rational points of view. In his literary approach he is essentially a 19th-century aesthete. Whatever he has written in Punjabi, apart from introductions to the works of new writers, has come as occasional sallies made to oblige the editors of Punjabi magazines.

As such he has carved out a niche for himself in Punjabi literature as an essayist. His essays can be classified into three groups, social, political and critical and are published in collections such as *Navian Sochan* (New Thoughts), *Sahaj Subhau* (In the Natural Course) and *Punjabi Bhaure* (Romantic Heroes of Punjab). The first two are comments on life and literature from a liberal point of view and he gives lifelike accounts of Punjabi love legends.

Teja Singh's style is simple, lucid, and grammatically correct. There is a certain monotony of tone that is however broken quite often by witty sallies, sly humour and novelty and originality of perception.

He has done some occasional research in the history of Punjabi language and given a kind of higher liberal exposition of the Sikh religious doctrine.

SSS

Balbir Singh (1894–1974)

Dr. Balbir Singh is another thinker and expositor of Sikh literature. He is a man of much learning, both of eastern and western philosophy, besides a teacher of botany. His essays are available in collections like *Charan Hari Visthar* (Detailed Account of Charan Singh) about his father, Dr. Charan Singh whose contribution to Punjabi literature has been noticed in an earlier chapter. *Kalam di Karamat* (The Miracle of the Pen), which is a commentary on the work of writers from both east and west, contains an essay on the poetry of Bhai Vir Singh also, who was his elder brother. In his later years Dr. Balbir Singh started publishing through the Punjabi University, Patiala, an etymological encyclopaedia of the *Guru Granth* which he did not live to complete.

SSS

Sahib Singh (1894–1977)

Sahib Singh has written mostly on moral and religious themes. His essays can be said to be original expositions of *Gurubani* for their liberal, rational and humanist approach. He bases his observations not only on references from Sikh scriptures and history but also on scientific and psychological perceptions. His writing is valuable for its lucid and clear style.

SSS

Kapur Singh (1909–1986)

Kapur Singh, a former Indian Civil Service officer, possessing much wide learning and experience, has written a respectable amount of prose published in collections such as *Pundrik* (The Lotus), *Bahu Visthar* (In Detail) and *Sapt Shring* (Seven Tops).

Kapur Singh's prose displays his learning of both Sanskrit and Western philosophy. His prose is erudite and copiously loaded with Sanskrit vocabulary. The last-mentioned work gives brief life accounts of men and women from various walks of life, in which he has managed to rise above the level of his strong likes and dislikes. He was known as a staunch Sikh which quality is evident in his latest work, *Sachi Sakhi* (True Account), which is a rather passionate and subjective account of events connected with conferences and discussions about independence, division of the country and, as he says, injustice meted out to Sikhs in the process.

SSS

Devinder Satyarthi (b. 1908)

Devinder Satyarthi has published some accounts of folksongs, folk art and folk customs in books like *Gidha* (The Clapping of Hands), *Kanchan Mati* (Golden Earth), and *Murhke di Khushbu* (The Fragrance of Sweat). His writing is simple, sentimental and instructive.

SSS

Balwant Gargi (b. 1911)

Balwant Gargi has written character-sketches of many of his contemporaries, which are original, witty, sometimes sarcastic and inconoclastic, touching intimately on the idiosyncrasies and foibles of his subjects. While he has given in this way matter for the amusement of his readers, he has trodden upon the toes of most of the writers that he has taken up to discuss. As character-sketches these are a unique mixture of constructive studies and destructive caricatures of his subject. Three such collections have been published under the titles, *Nim de Patte* (Leaves of Neem), *Surme Wali Akh* (The Kohl-lined Eye) and *Hasin Chehre* (Handsome Faces). The titles are fairly indicative of the treatment that he has accorded his subjects.

SSS

Gurbachan Singh Talib (1911–1986)

Gurbachan Singh Talib was a scholar of Shakespeare and English literature. He has done considerable translation work in Punjabi

and written scattered criticism and appreciation of Punjabi writing in introductions to books and occasional critical essays. His collection of critical essays, *Unpachhate Rah* (Unfamiliar Roads) provides an excellent example of his literary acumen and learning.

SSS

Ishwar Chitrakar (1912–1968)

Ishwar Chitrakar is the author of two collections of essays entitled *Kalam di Awaz* (The Voice of the Pen) and *Gal Bat* (Conversation). His prose is light and witty with a concealed irony. Some of the essays give an impression of being character-sketches and caricatures.

SSS

Piara Singh 'Padam' (b. 1912)

Piara Singh Padam has written on different subjects in a popular manner. *Hindustani Kala* (Indian Art), *Hindustani Kavi* (Indian Poets), *Hindustani Kavita* (Indian Poetry) provide simple information about the subjects indicated in the titles. *Sola Kalan* (Sixteen Arts) and *Kalam de Dhani* (Masters of the Pen) similarly afford elementary information about Indian writers. In *Panj Darya* (Five Rivers), he offers a simple study of five major religions of the world.

SSS

Narinder Pal Singh (b. 1921)

Narinder Pal Singh, better known as a novelist, has written essays and travel diaries and other miscellaneous prose. A collection of essays under the modest title of *Nik Suk* (Little and Small) is instructive, witty and humorous at the same time.

SSS

Suba Singh (1919–1983)

Suba Singh is a master of humour and wit with the purpose of entertainment and idol-breaking. His collections are entitled *Alop Ho Rahe Chetak* (Disappearing Amusement), *Zahrile Hase* (Poisonous Jokes), and *Hase Te Hadsa* (Jokes and Accidents).

SSS

Ajeet Cour (b. 1934)

Ajeet Cour, primarily a short story writer, has of late emerged as a painstaking perceptive columnist with courage of convictions. Her reportages of significant cultural events like fairs and festivals, of which there is no dearth in India, are eagerly looked forward to. Her immaculate taste helps her readers to better appreciation of cultural values and should also give direction to the so-called influx of cultural activity in the midst of our droughts and floods, communal tensions and political wrangle-ridden society today.

Takiye da Peer is a collection of pen-portraits of a select band of cultural luminaries of the Punjab Ajeet has taken fancy to. Most of the sketches have already appeared in *Arsee*, a Punjabi monthly, from time to time and have attracted considerable attention of the author's innumerable admirers.

Like a fussy painter, the first thing she asks for is sittings one after another until she is fully saturated gleaning your past and present and imbibing glimpses of as many facets of your personality as possible. And this in spite of the fact that almost all of those figuring in this gallery of portraits are known to her whom she meets frequently in the normal course.

Having done that, she sets out to make art out of life. She casts her facts in an aesthetic framework. And yet she does not lose her hold on truth. Her sketches are selectively keyed to the essence of life.

Like the mythical bird that drinks nectar and feeds on pearls alone, Ajeet highlights only the healthy traits, the resplendent features of her subjects. It is these that attracted her to them, otherwise why should she have bothered about them? She is no 'sanitary inspector'. She is a cherisher of life, a dealer in virtue and goodness. In her own words: 'It is no mere collection of sketches: it is my homage to these little gods who create beauty in the world ridden with selfishness and self-centredness. Today everyone is anxious to snatch something from life, forging ahead treading on others' toes. An artist is a creator. He lends charm to life. The world rests on his shoulders. This volume is an attempt to present glimpses of some of them.'

Ajeet is no path-finder in this genre. She has as her predecessor a stalwart in Balwant Gargi who has more than one collection of sketches of prominent and not-so-prominent personalities to his credit. But his approach is entirely different. There is hardly anyone

ranging from Amrita Pritam to Harnam Singh 'Shan' whom Gargi did not give offence to with his 'malice' what Khushwant does avowedly in his celebrated column. It is entirely different with Ajeet. Essentially good-hearted, she sees only the good in others; rather she goes out of her way to justify lapses and abbrations in those she decides to write about, whether it be Khushwant or Duggal, Gargi or Virk.

Ajeet has covered a wide enough field. Khushwant writes in English, Duggal, Gargi and Virk in Punjabi, Krishna Sobti in Hindi, Padma Sachdev is a songster in Dogri, Gurcharan Singh is a potter and Pritam Singh is a Punjabi publisher whose sketch called *Takiye da Peer* lends its title to the volume.

"Galan da Jadugar", the sketch devoted to Balwant Gargi, is the longest, Khushwant's entitled "Bhola Badshah" is the warmest, "Neela Ghumiar" and "Takiye da Peer" portraying Gurcharan Singh and Pritam Singh, respectively, are full of information. The rest are loaded with her affection of a large-hearted Punjabi peasant-woman. Ajeet Cour is a charmer who gleans beauty from around her and is just content with that. A taste of it can be had in the torrential flow of her prose-writing with her enthusiasm for the subject she is dealing with.

Her writings make delightful reading. But does it elevate? Every reader has to find his own answer to it.

KSD

16

Autobiography

Biography is the art of making art out of life. Autobiography is the way of getting outside the self, of striving to be objective.

Biography or autobiography is the history of an individual becoming collective and inclusive of others' experience.

Autobiography, at times, helps to regenerate a writer after a decline in his creative activity by exploring his past without getting involved in it.

A biographer or an autobiographer uses imagination to mediate between the self and history; he seeks analogues between individual and communal experience and while presenting them he offers a new vision to the reader.

At times he uses the tools of a novelist and he is perfectly justified in it as for instance, when a biographer or an autobiographer seems to zoom his camera and try to project a close-up to make a point.

Something may have to be changed for artistic purposes but a biography or autobiography remains in essence a factual account of an individual's life.

Autobiography is turning self-knowledge into art as much as biography is making art out of someone's life.

Punjabi literature can claim to have produced some outstanding autobiographies. Some of these are Gur Baksh Singh's *Meri Jiwan Katha*, M.S. Randhawa's *Aap Beeti*, Kartar Singh Duggal's *Kis Peh Khohlon Ganthri*, Amrita Pritam's *Rasidi Ticket*, Dalip Kaur Tiwana's *Nange Pairan da Safar*, Wanjara Bedi's *Adhi Mitti Adha Sona* and Ajeet Cour's *Savian Chidian*.

Gur Baksh Singh's (1895–1971) *Meri Jiwan Katha* (My Life Story) is an account more of those who influenced the author in the formative period of his life. The technique adopted in narrating

the story is that of a journalist writing for his organ. He must try and make every episode complete in itself. The link is provided by the author whose story it is.

It is interesting to find that Prof. H. Riggs of the Michigan University mentioning in his testimonial issued to Gur Baksh Singh "... I take pleasure in testifying not only to his industry and ability as a student but to his fine personality and moral character and to the fact that he did much to raise the general opinion of the community towards the Indian students on account of his high ideals and his freedom from any revolutionary connection or belief, and on account of his loyalty to the best ideals of the Government." It has been my conviction that more than any one else it was his own son Navtej, a leftist activist, who pulled his father out of his fascination for the American way of life and the so-called bourgeois values and introduced him to socialism. The child as Wordsworth says, is father of the man. Gur Baksh Singh told this story in the companion volume, *Manzil Dis Pai.*

Dr. Mohinder Singh Randhawa's (1909–86) autobiography is written with a biographical approach. The account is selectively keyed to the essence of life. In fact, in his honesty of approach, Dr. Randhawa asked his elder sister, Harbans Kaur, to tell the story of the first 10 years of his life which evidently he has edited before incorporating it in the volume. It is not the language of lies; it is the language of the heart. Truth comes to the reader in seemingly unpremeditated words. It is the confession of a peasant caught unawares. It is like listening to the tape-recording of the author's typical manner of narrating events. It gives relief from the degraded language of politics and hypocrisy, pettiness and parochialism.

Of late biographies and autobiographies rather than being selective are becoming more and more all-inclusive. It is due to the anti-excellence spirit pervading in the West. It believes in the equality of everything so that according to this school, all facts are equally important. The author is not expected to presume and exercise his judgement.

Dr. Randhawa has shared with his readers only those events and happenings that, according to him, merit recording. It is enough that he told the daughter of his landlady in London that he was happily married and that he could only be a friend. Or when he reported to Sardar Patel that the Khaksars wished to raid

a Muslim League meeting in the Imperial Hotel but he saved the ugly situation by deputing a police force in time, the Sardar remarked that he need not have been over-anxious about it.

Similarly he has no hesitation in mixing yesterdays and tomorrows or going backward and forward, if it is in the interest of the point he wishes to highlight. At times he states an event again, at others he repeats a telling observation if it helps underline an issue. And he does it with the consummate ease of a sage imparting the truths of life as visualised by him.

Similarly, it is most rewarding to read how Dr. Randhawa would size up a person with a single stroke of his pen.

It is not that Dr. Randhawa remains preoccupied with big events and big people. There is a fascinating account of his dog Pappu who seemed to have acquired the devotion and the will-power of his master. And there are ever so many other such characters and incidents.

But it is only an incomplete story. Dr. Randhawa wished to pick up the thread with the Punjab Agricultural University whose destiny he guided for so many years and share with his readers the bringing about of the Green Revolution of which he is the creator, if the credit may go to a single person, but it was not to be and he passed away suddenly in 1986.

In *Kis Peh Khohlon Ganthri* (Whom Shall I Tell my Tale?) Kartar Singh Duggal (b. 1917) tells his story more in the manner of a short story writer. The fact that the work was initially serialised simultaneously in three important dailies of the Punjab on a weekly basis for about three years in the original Punjabi and in translation in Hindi and Urdu, the author's endeavour seems to make every episode appear to be complete in itself. It has its advantage and disadvantage too. Rather than talking about himself, most of the time the author talks about those who came in touch with him and in this way he relives his times. Spanning 618 pages it is probably the largest work in this genre so far in the language.

Kartar Singh Duggal has narrated his story of a writer in another volume entitled *Meri Sahitik Jeewani* (My Literary Career) commissioned by the Punjabi University.

Rasidi Ticket is Amrita Pritam's (b. 1919) remarkably bold autobiography.

There is an interesting story about the title of the book. It is said that Amrita Pritam told Khushwant Singh that she was

contemplating to write her autobiography. Khushwant heard it and cynically remarked, "Well, your life could be contained on a Revenue Stamp (Rasidi Ticket)." A writer of uncommon passion, Amrita took up the challenge and wrote an account which is perhaps her best prose work so far and has been translated into several languages.

Kamala Das has written:

> If I have loved others, father,
> I swear I have loved you the most.

This is the impression one gets after reading this much-maligned story of a rebel daughter of the Punjab who is adored for the manner in which she says what her readers may decry from the core of their hearts. Amrita Pritam is a great charmer with words. Life-long devotion exclusively to writing has given her command over her pen which few of her contemporaries can boast of. She owes her popularity to her no-nonsense attitude. A single-minded pursuit has crowned her with success whichever field she has chosen to enter. Reading her story one feels that she has been a lot sinned against than sinning in our male-dominated society. And what an odyssey of life she can claim! The only daughter of a deeply religious father, she has forged her way to the pinnacle of secular glory in Independent India.

Dr. Dalip Kaur Tiwana's (b. 1938) *Nange Pairan da Safar* (A Barefoot Journey) reads like a long short story, the genre in which she hardly has a peer.

The difficulty with a fiction writer, more especially a short story writer, is that he or she is much too conscious about form. He would rather not leave any thread loose or unattended to. Life is hardly like that. It may be stranger than fiction; it is never as taped out and as chiselled as a piece of art.

A short-story writer attempting a novel tends to make every sequence complete in itself. So that eventually the novel reads like a chain of short stories cleverly strung together. A novelist writing an autobiography can scarcely resist the temptation of bringing his imagination to overbear the naked reality of happenings.

This is what has happened in *Nange Pairan da Safar.* It is a moving story of a baby-girl born to parents looking for male progeny. She is forsaken and forgotten like her mother who has repeatedly failed to produce a son for her husband. The father with his

feudal propensities is a drunkard and profligate The only son of his parents, it is all the more becoming that he should have a son to inherit his property. An unwanted child is adopted by an aunt from the town. She is thus rescued from an out-of-the-way, superstition-ridden backward village and a father who is in search of another wife who can give him a male successor.

The conditions in Patiala, the city where she is brought to live in are hardly any better. The people have yet not outlived the memories of a Maharaja who had acquired 360 wives. They believed that he was a reincarnation of Lord Krishna. They boasted that he had eloped with "a British Governor's daughter though he had to part with Simla as a dower for the white woman."

A drunken cousin tries to molest her. In order to be rid of the responsibility of a growing girl, she is married against her wishes while she is still studying in school. The only time she goes to her husband's house is after her wedding when her father-in-law, a drunkard, creates a scene. The next we hear about her husband is towards the close of the present volume when he appears on the scene seeking legal separation to which she readily agrees.

The story is told by a master artiste; it contains telling sidelights on our society today in a subtle manner: If the mother-in-law is dead, it is all the more welcome, the bride can take charge of the household straightaway. If the husband is a drunkard, he must be well-to-do to afford it and then who doesn't drink these days? The boy has failed in matriculation. So what? He would get through next year. And why must he bother about it? They have a fleet of buses to look after. The girl has to be married; the refuse must be consigned to the refuse dump.

Then there is a private tutor threatening to commit suicide if not loved in return, utterly unimaginative school teachers, college lecturers and professors bestowing favours at various levels with varied interests at heart. How typical are Dalip's encounters with Principal Teja Singh, the grand old man of Punjabi letters! "Don't you sir me; you should call me *papaji*. I had a daughter as young and as charming as you are. She was snatched away by death." Principal Teja Singh must have told this to hundreds of young girls he came across in his old age.

Dalip seems to be an unassuming, simple girl, tormented all her life. She is afflicted but she is a lioness at heart; a no non-sense young woman, she tells her tormentors that enough is

enough; if they persisted in their mischief, she knew how to handle a revolver and a gun, she would kill them all and then shoot herself. The next day they are brought to their knees.

Betrayals, one after another, left Dalip an inveterate cynic. Interviewing her once, Amrita Pritam asked her, "You have so many men working round you; why don't you make friends with one of them?" "They have all strayed from the *Panchtantra*. One is a jackal, the other is a fox, and yet another may be a wolf. They only look like men, but they are not human beings," says Dalip.

It is a deeply sensitive writing done by one who seems to have paid dearly for it. At places it is still soaked in blood, while at others it is wet with tears. Here is a senior Punjabi writer who definitely knows her job. She has suffered grievously at the hands of a cruel society and she pays it back in its own coin. She has bitter memories. Every word that she writes has a sting in it. Not without good reason.

Dr. Sohinder Singh Wanjara Bedi's autobiography *Adhi Mitti Adha Sona* (Half Dust and Half Gold) is a fascinating study. Wanjara Bedi's father was dying. He had earlier been discharged from hospital as a hopeless case. The entire family had gathered round his bed. Wanjara Bedi alone was lying prostrate in the adjoining room imploring God to spare his dad's life. "He must not die!" He begged God again and again. A patient of cancer, his father was in frightful agony. His limbs were swollen. He was writhing in pain. "He must not die!" He entreated the 'Almighty when his mother came in and said, "His suffering has become unbearable." The son stood up and looked into his mother's eyes. "He must die," she said. "Must he?" As he uttered these words there was a dreadful shriek in the next room. His father was gone.

On his way to the hospital, the previous evening to attend on his ailing father, he was reciting his prayers. All of a sudden he went into an ecstasy. He longed to have a glimpse of the Eternal. He must. And there on the roadside when the evening shadows were darkening he found a cloud of refulgence move towards him and the next moment he was engulfed in its resplendence.

Not many days ago, when he was returning home from his college, a charming young girl passed him by. She must look back, he said to himself. And lo and behold! The girl *did* look back. She must wave to me, he willed. The girl stopped and waved to

him. Blasphemous, to say the least. He had a sudden revulsion for all this and he wended his way home.

It is a delightful adventure of an untutored youth who forges along into the spiritual world with his uncanny manoeuvres. He seems to have his way until one day when there is a sudden breakdown. He would have nothing to do with God who takes away his father, leaving behind the burden of eight mouths to be fed by a young lad who had hardly crossed his twenties. There is a satanic revolt and everything seems to be over with his spiritual enterprise.

Probably more interesting than this are the snapshots of the Partition days. Dr. Wanjara Bedi invests his narrative with intimate details of a youth who has a widowed mother, a newly-married wife and a young sister with a number of other brothers and sisters to evacuate and then resettle with hardly any resources at his disposal. Before they leave their newly constructed house in Rawalpindi, word goes round that the goondas would attack the non-Muslim mohalla that night. The author takes his young sister to be left for the night at a house which is better fortified against the rioters' attack. Before he parts with his sister, he tells her what to do if assaulted, how to trace her people if abducted. Equally interesting is their refusal to stay in a refugee camp and rent a two-room tenement which the house-owner used until that morning for his cattle and their fodder.

Dr. Sohinder Singh (Wanjara Bedi b. 1924) is a leading student of folklore. It is only a fraction of what bids to be a saga of indomitable endeavour in pursuit of one's lofty goals. It tells the story of the first 22 years the more exciting part of the tale follows in *Galliye Chikar Dur Ghar* (The Streets are Slushy and the House is Far Away).

The story opens in Sialkot, the town associated with Salwahan, the legendary hero of the Punjab where Dr. Bedi was born. His people, however, came from Dhani-Pothoar, the region famous for Salwahan's exploits. A Bedi belonging to Guru Nanak's caste and a first-born, Dr. Bedi's birth and childhood were steeped in folklore and superstitious practices. It was believed that he could cure certain ailments and whether he liked it or not, he must play his part; this is what he was supposed to have inherited from his father and paternal grandfather's father. His early youth was spent in the most romantic region of the Punjab amidst the carefree

Pothoari damsels. Gulbano teases him. He chases her. She runs faster than he could ever do. And then she suddenly stops in a sequestered corner, "Come, Oh! Sardar lad, you are hardly going to kill me." And she looks at him with wistful eyes. He is helpless.

According to Dr. Bedi, autobiography is the art of identifying oneself in the crowd of life around one. Mercifully Dr. Bedi is conscious of the fact that it is no easy job. That he has succeeded in it where many a more skilful writer had failed earlier, goes to his credit. He succeeds because of the utter sincerity of his approach. There is a touch of unsophistication, artlessness in his art.

The difficulty with Dr. Bedi's precursors is that they wrote their autobiographies when they had attained a certain degree of eminence. Their endeavour appears to have been to recapitulate their past in the reflections of their later glory. This seems to distort the images and a perceptive reader remains unconvinced. Luckily for Punjabi writing, Dr. Bedi has recorded his account of the formative years of his life before adorning himself with the blinkers of eminence.

Dr Bedi does not seem to present history as a crisis. He recognizes the partition of the country only when it intrudes upon his career. He casts his experiences in an aesthetic frame-work rather than record the events of the history he witnessed.

However, what is remarkable about this volume is the inspired note of the writing. There is a torrential flow. The entire work is said to have been completed in six weeks. It reminds one of Puran Singh, the great master of Punjabi prose. Indeed, it seems Puran Singh is reborn. Dr Bedi has the same inspiration, the same abandon, he lives at the same emotional level.

Savian Chidian (Sea-Green Sparrows) is another scintillating autobiographical writing. Ajeet Cour may pretend to be telling a story—and she is a short story writer of rare charm—yet those who have known her find vivid glimpses of her chequered career in her writing. *Savian Chidian* is a miscellany of her selected writings with a number of remarkable autobiographical pieces, pleasant and painful, gay and grim.

And Ajeet is shockingly bold. She outdoes Amrita Pritam, her mentor. Manto would feel quite embarrassed at some of her writings. But she is sincere. She gives the impression of being savagely candid. She does not indulge in obscenity because it is

the fashion. She is loud because she has found indecency at every step in her life. Her observations are portraitures of life in the raw, in all its naked beauty and ugliness. The sensitive artist in her has recorded the pettiness of man and yet his resistless charm for the woman in her. The callousness of fate and yet her willing surrender to its dictates. She has known what sensual love is and yet she hungers for it, to suffer its sweet-bitter agony once again. Hardly the earlier pain subsides when Ajeet like an infatuated doe goes out wildly looking for her buck, any buck. He may be of her age or several years senior to her.

Still in her forties, Ajeet has seen untold ups and downs in life. Loved and rebuffed. Sought after and sneered at. Married and separated. Lived in affluence and utter penury.

To my mind, this volume should have opened with "Safed to Kali hawa di Dastan" in which she tells the intoxicating story of her maiden love. She was too young. He was too unsophisticated. They met daily and spent hours in the loneliest of lonely spots until their escapades were discovered and paternal discipline enforced. The young man was willing to marry her. Her parents also gave their reluctant consent. But as ill luck would have it, the marriage never took place. Ajeet has no regrets excepting that when they could, they didn't commit sin.

This piece should be followed by "Faltoo Aurat", a long short story. A piece of brilliant writing, it should do credit to anyone for its intense exploration of the self. With flourish after flourish of a consummate artist, Ajeet paints the picture of a mistress. She is neither a friend nor a wife. She has to wait for forty-two days to earn his company for an evening. And once she has warmed his bed, she has no use left for him; he has other engagements in the town before he goes back to his place of duty. How she longs for him! How she deceives herself! How she compromises her self-respect of a woman! And how she is left alone to be hauled on the smouldering charcoals of indignity!

Then should follow 'One Zero One', a dirge of a helpless Indian mother who sees her young daughter with third degree burns sink inch by inch helplessly from across a glass wall in a French clinic. She is not permitted to go into her chamber lest she carried infection of an outsider. She can talk to the patient only on intercom. For seven long days the mother in Ajeet suffers agony, breaking her head against the dead wall of discipline. Her

daughter, a scholarship-holder, begs for a sip of water but water she must not have. Such is her ailment. No amount of her mother's pleadings prevails on the medical staff on duty. And then the inevitable happens. The daughter who is hardly twenty-one dies, leaving her mother to wail for her all her life!

After this "Mera Kamra" should give Ajeet's reader a glimpse into her life as a writer. How, where and when she writes. It is indeed a miracle that she is able to produce so much in spite of the chaotic conditions in which she has lived all these years. More than the quantity what amazes her reader is the quality of her writing, uniformly satisfying, aesthetically superb.

"Man te Main", a self-portrait in words, to my mind, completes the picture. It is a sort of summing-up as well as a quick, cursory look at Ajeet's afflicted career. A heart that is broken many a time and its pieces buried here and there. They lie in their graves which the author in Ajeet rips open at times to cry over and mourn.

It is the story of a tumultuous life, torn at every step mercilessly. And yet Ajeet seems to give a single-handed fight of a brave modern Indian woman undaunted by odds against her.

Ajeet continues her story in *Khanabadosh* (Gypsy), another equally fascinating volume.

KSD

17

Literary Criticism

There was no tradition of literary criticism in Punjabi before the advent of the 20th century. Attempts at teaching prosody to aspirants were made towards the beginning of the present century in the form of books on prosody. Bhai Bishan Dass Puri may be said to have made a beginning in this direction with his *Chhand Prabodh* (Primer of Prosody).

A remarkable work of this time is *Guru Chhand Divakara* of Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha in which he has explained the system of prosody followed in the figures of speech used again in the *Gurubani*. These works are notable for their diligent analysis.

Maula Bakhsh Kushta, himself a poet of the *Kissa* tradition, wrote *Punjab de Hire* (Jewels of Punjab) in which he attempted to give brief sheet-roles of Punjabi poets with their biographical data, but the criticism does not amount to more than an elementary appreciation of their work.

SSS

Bawa Budh Singh (1878–1931)

Bawa Budh Singh did more substantial work, writing of earlier Punjabi poets and their work with copious quotations, in a spirit of admiration, commendably bringing out at the same time their true merit. *Koel Ku* (The Trills of the Koel)treats of the poets of the Mughal period from Hafiz Barkhurdar to Waris Shah and offers an elementary theory of poetry; *Bambiha Bol* (The Rainbirds' Note) deals with the poets of the Sikh period. *Hans Chog* (The Swan's Feed) winds up with the later poets of the end of the 19th century. He does not attempt a criticism of contemporaries such as Bhai Vir Singh or Dhani Ram 'Chatrik' and has confined himself to poetry. He draws freely on ballads of the Punjab collected and

edited by Sir Richard Temple with the help of Punjab's professional bards.

Thus Bawa Budh Singh may be taken as the founder or pioneer of literary criticism in Punjabi. But he does not follow or expound any philosophy or theory of criticism. His is more an appreciation in which the subjective element is intrusive. He was evidently impelled to perform this task by a sense of patriotism, and to place Punjabi poetry up to the end of the 19th century in the modern West-oriented context. Indeed, he sought to establish the identity of Punjabi literature and to claim for it a patrimony that was not in his view negligible. He seems in his work to follow the method of Hudson's *Introduction to the Study of English Literature* adding the observations of Urdu poet-critics like Mohammed Husain Azad and Altaf Hussain Hali.

SSS

Puran Singh (1881–1931)

Puran Singh was impelled by the example and precept of Bhai Vir Singh to study Punjabi literature and to write some prose and poetry in Punjabi. In his poetic compositions, he is inspired chiefly by the American poet Walt Whitman. In his prose writing he seems to follow the philosophy—idealistic and hero-worshipping, even anti-modern in the manner of the English writer Thomas Carlyle. In a few essays like "Kavita" (Poetry), "Kavi da Dil" (The Poet's Heart), and "Art" he has attempted to present a philosophy of literature and art which is rather archaic, inspirational and mystical. For instance, he describes poetry as 'words uttered by men steeped in love.'

SSS

Teja Singh (1894–1958)

A measure of objectivity was brought into Punjabi literary appreciation by Teja Singh, who was for the greater part of his life a teacher of English literature at Khalsa College, Amritsar. He brought his close study of English literature and contemporary Western literary criticism to bear on the Punjabi writing of his day, both of his own generation like the work of Bhai Vir Singh, Dhani Ram 'Chatrik' and Kripa Sagar and of his juniors like Mohan Singh and Amrita Pritam. His role was for the most part that of a

literary sponsor, writing introductions to and reviews of contemporary Punjabi publications. He was indeed a friend, philosopher and guide to the new writers, seldom strident, bitter or destructive. On the other hand, he often laid himself open to the charge of being too soft and laudatory. He eschewed any attempt to propound or follow a philosophy or theory of literary criticism and was content to be humanistic and liberal. In the later part of his life he stirred himself up to collect and publish his critical writings in *Sahitya Darshan* (Philosophy of Literature) and judged by the progress made in Punjabi criticism in the post-independence period, Teja Singh's criticism was, at best, that of a pioneer in the field.

SSS

Mohan Singh Oberoi (1899–1984)

Mohan Singh Oberoi, Head of the Department of Punjabi in the University of Punjab, Lahore, and then after Independence in the Punjab University, Chandigarh, was well placed for the job and amply qualified, too. But he remained engrossed in literary research and did not devote enough time to literary criticism. He wrote the first systematic history of Punjabi literature in English as well as in Punjabi, which for all his erratic dicta scattered here and there, is esteemed for its authenticity and perceptiveness. He collected and published his occasional sallies in literary criticism in a volume entitled *Sahitya Sarovar* (Lake of Literature), which shows him to be a conservative and classicist in judgement, though rather dry and unsentimental.

SSS

Sant Singh Sekhon (b. 1908)

University level criticism in Punjabi can be said to have started after 1950 when Punjabi became a subject of post-graduate studies in the Punjab University. Some of the scholars who involved themselves in this field were Professor Sant Singh Sekhon, Dr. Surinder Singh Kohli, Dr. Attar Singh, Dr. Harbhajan Singh, Dr. Tejwant Singh Gill and Dr. Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia.

Sant Singh Sekhon took, as he says, T.S. Eliot and I.A. Richards for models. In the thirties he had been drawn into the Progressive Writers' Movement which led him to adopt a Marxist tone in

literary interpretation. "The main plank of my creed," he says, "is that literature is a part of the social super-structure and has a distinct class structure. My concern of this nature with Punjabi literature and criticism led me to write a treatise on the interpretation of literature, to which I have given the title *Sahityartha* (Meaning of Literature, 1957). I have imbibed specific Marxist influence from Prof. Thomson, Christopher Caudwell and most of all Georgy Lukacs. The general trend of my criticism has been to decry idealistic attitudes as well as a modernist heresy and anarchism. While I am an admirer of the old masters, the Sikh Gurus, the Muslim Sufis and the writers of verse romances, I have not accepted their philosophy and attitude towards life." Sekhon has written much on the poetry of the above-mentioned poetic traditions. His *Punjabi Kavi Shiromani* (The Eminent Figures of Punjabi Poetry, 1965) deals with the oldest Punjabi poetry of Farid, the Sikh Gurus, and Bhai Gurudas.

SSS

Gopal Singh (1917–90)

A writer-politician is no new phenomenon in contemporary India. We have known Jawaharlal Nehru and Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and Dr. Zakir Husain, Gyani Gurmukh Singh 'Musafir' and Khushwant Singh. In Dr. Gopal Singh, we have an academician-politician with a marked tilt for creative writing.

One of the leading Punjabi writers of the forties, Dr. Gopal Singh drifted to politics an utterly disillusioned scholar. What with petty rivalries in the academic circles and lack of appreciation for creative talent in our parts, he remained in the wilderness for an agonisingly long period.

In the political field Dr. Gopal Singh scored an outstanding success. He was nominated to the Rajya Sabha, then served as Ambassador in a number of countries, followed by the Chairmanship of the High-powered Minorities Commission, finishing with a Governorship. However, like Gyani Gurmukh Singh 'Musafir' he did not lose touch with literary activity all these years and can claim equally creditable achievements not only as a Punjabi poet but also as a literary critic.

He has produced a large number of research articles and a considerable volume of literary criticism. His research is original

and his criticism penetrating. Starting with *Romanchic Punjabi Kavi* (Romantic Punjabi Poets) in 1938 when he introduced new norms into Punjabi literary criticism, he has authored *Punjabi Sahitya da Itihas* (History of Punjabi Literature), *Sahitya di Parakh* (Evaluating Literature) and recently *Guru Granth Saheb di Sahitik Visheshata* (Literary Appreciation of the *Guru Granth Saheb*). Essentially a creative writer and a poet, his literary assessment is invariably perceptive, sympathetic and well-informed. The literary evaluation of the *Holy Granth* is a work of sustained research and deep devotion. Since values in the realm of literary criticism keep on changing, it was hoped that having retired from active politics, Dr. Gopal Singh would have time to bring his formulations up-to-date in the revised editions of his published works. But death overtook him.

Apart from his literary activity in Punjabi, what took his readers the world over by storm was Dr. Gopal Singh's single-handed translation into English of *Sri Guru Granth Saheb* (*The Holy Granth*).

Rendering of the *Holy Granth* has defied many a translator all these years. M.A. Macauliffe who is best known in the field had a cream of Sikh scholarship at his disposal to assist him. Unlike Trumpp his motives are least suspect if one ignores his anxiety to inculcate a sense of loyalty among the Sikh community to the rulers of the day, the British. Both these projects were, evidently, sponsored. Later attempts were of varied magnitude but essentially perfunctory until Khushwant Singh whom one finds painstaking and meticulous with sovereign command over the English language and idiom.

It needed devotion and discipline, philosophic insight and mystic abstraction, scholarship of Sanskrit, Persian, Prakrit and Punjabi and no less proficiency in English to undertake translation of the *Holy Granth*. Dr. Gopal Singh combined in him all these and more—the devotion of a *Gursikh*. The vocabulary in the *Holy Granth* is highly subjective and associative. At times it is bewildering. Rendering it into another language and an alien idiom becomes the despair of a translator. That Dr. Gopal Singh could forge his way through is no ordinary achievement. It is a monumental work done by the author on his own without any financial support from the community or the government. It has been applauded by high and low. Dr. Gopal Singh's equally important work in English is *A History of the Sikh People* brought out in the late eighties.

Incorporating a fund of fresh data, it is one of the most researched works on the subject.

A strenuously hard working scholar, Dr. Gopal Singh with his single-minded devotion remained undaunted and made excellent use of the lack of appreciation of his literary talent in the academic circles during his formative years.

KSD

Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia (b. 1935)

Of the younger generation, two writers who have contributed most substantially to the development of Punjabi criticism are Dr. Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia and Dr. Attar Singh (b. 1932). The former made a significant contribution in the middle fifties when he interpreted Punjabi progressive poetry of the school of Mohan Singh and Amrita Pritam as deriving its values and validity from the historic alliance of middle-class individualism and revolutionary socialist force (*Tradition and Experiment in Modern Panjabi Poetry*, p 12). He omitted to make it explicit, though it was implied in his analysis, that the compromise extended back emotionally even to feudal sensibility. And when he accused what he called the Amrita-Mohan Singh school of clinging to folk imagery and the device of humanization of nature, he was in fact referring to the feudal hang-over that characterises Indian bourgeosie and in some degree even socialist modes of expression in our country. He advocated advance from his level of emotional organisation to the next which according to him is indicated by the industrialisation taking place in the country with all its moral and emotional stresses and strains. According to him, the new poets, whom he calls experimentalists, ought to attempt and are in fact attempting to evolve a new basis consistent with our growing industrial milieu. In this attempt he gives the first place to the evolution of a new non-idealistic imagery. He calls this a further step in progressivism and seems to take the position of a para-Marxist.

The premises on which Dr. Ahluwalia bases his argument are unexceptional and the necessity of carrying progressivism a step further is admitted by all schools of thought. Dr. Ahluwalia tries to dissociate himself from those who would go surrealistic in this endeavour and rejects Freudian psycho-analysis and the free-association mode of dreams.

SSS

Attar Singh (b. 1932)

Attar Singh has so far published three collections of critical essays—*Kavya Adhyayan* (Study of Poetry), *Drishtikon* (Viewpoint), and *Samadarshan* (Perspectives). In Attar Singh's view, it is the first duty of progressive literature to fight against those tendencies that would tie literature to reaction. This can best be done, according to him, by enlightened progressive thinking, if it offers intellectual guidance to social forces and leads them to the ideal stage of social evolution, socialism. He admits that in literature, viewpoint and motive flowing from the uniqueness of the writer's experience must be artistically patterned. In the context of Indian society, he suggests a compromise between the artistic and the popular, between expression and communication. Taking his measure of modernity, he sees two aspects of it in relation to Indian society. One aspect is constructive, arousing in the reader curiosity, an appetite for knowledge and a tendency to doubt which widens the circle of human thought and gives it a new strength to confront new possibilities. In the second aspect, "symptoms of crisis have begun to appear in the life of the individual as well as in society" in India. With the march of time, Indian culture is getting caught in the embrace of the machine civilisation and the culture of the West and this crisis is made more acute because of the conflict between the two leading socialist countries, creating an atmosphere of cynicism, doubt and lack of faith among Indian writers. He regards the second aspect of modernity as only partially applicable to the human condition in India which is much more strongly inspired with hope for the future.

Attar Singh's long essay, 'The Background of the Punjabi Literature', is full of rare insights. He has pointed to the lack both of variety of content and of form in Punjabi literature of the pre-British period. This he attributes to a comparatively unchanging material life and a stagnant economy, which account for the predominance of symbols like Ranjha and Heer in this literature.

One thing in particular which Attar Singh has emphasised again and again is the comparative isolation of Punjabi literature from the main currents of literature in the rest of India. The reason he finds is the present-day alienation of Punjabi Muslims as well as Hindus from the Punjabi language as a vehicle of culture.

This isolation is sought to be broken these days by those who are often decried as Punjabi Sanskritists.

SSS

Harbhajan Singh (b. 1920)

Harbhajan Singh is comparatively a late comer in Punjabi criticism. His first collection of critical writings, *Mull te Mullankan* (Value and Valuation) is refreshingly original at the same time it is comprehensive in outlook. He deplores the predominance of political partisanship. "Punjabi criticism", he says, "has made no remarkable achievement outside evaluations, while evaluation in Hindi literature has proceeded on the basis of the pleasure principle (poetic value) and the social plurality principle (social values). Evaluation in Punjabi literature has accepted neither the pleasure principle nor the wider Indian culture as the criterion. Direction in place of pleasure and separatist provincial Punjabi identity in place of a collective culture have been the eminent modes. Not even artistic technique has attracted Punjabi thought as the basis of valuation."

In academic evaluation based on higher education, the same difficulty is faced, as "Sekhon's criticism owed allegiance to politics, not to higher education."

This weakness of Punjabi criticism is attributed by Dr. Harbhajan Singh to the fact that the Punjabi attitude still remains tribal, tied to a metaphysical creed (religious) or a social philosophy (Communism). Permutating these two and their negatives, Dr. Harbhajan Singh divides Punjabi literature into six classes, (1) Var (Lay or var and Romance) which is based on the tribal feeling but without religious moorings, (2) Gurumat, Poetry of the Sikh creed which is based on the religious feeling without tribal moorings, (3) Kissa, narrative verse romance, poetry of the individual fate tied to a religious feeling (making a religion of love), (4) Bhai Vir Singh's writings, based on religious feelings and with tribal moorings, (5) Progressive literature based both on tribal feelings (class affiliation) and religion (ideology), and (6) Literature of the individual's fate, free from religious moorings, which is as yet only a minor category (*Mull te Mullankan*, page 17).

Dr. Harbhajan Singh has brought into Punjabi criticism the concept of structure and texture. As he says, "Poetry does not only

possess structure but texture also... structure is only the argument of statement of a poetic work. From this it has got its specific shape... Texture has always been an obstacle in the way of structure. From the time of Aristotle co-existence of the Universal and the concrete has been acknowledged. Poetic beauty is born of the tension in this bipolar character. If we limit the study of poetic work to its structure, we shall become one-dimensional in our judgement more than is advisable. When in interpreting poetry we get detached from our pre-conceived system of evaluation, we must not forget that it has its own evaluation system, too". Thus Dr. Harbhajan Singh tries to strike a balance between a non-evaluative structuralist interpretation and an evaluative ideological interpretation.

Dr. Harbhajan Singh has applied his theory with good effect to *Gurubani* in essays entitled "Dharmik Kavya" (Religious Poetry) and to the poetry of Punjabi sufis in three essays, "Farid Bani", "Punjabi Sufi Davya", and "Kalam Sufian" in the above-mentioned collections. According to him, the inspiration behind religious poetry is "uncertainty and helplessness." These, he says, "are not only the remnants of the pre-historical age, but are everyday realities in the historical age also."

Dr. Harbhajan Singh does not entirely accept the Freudian theory in this context but he acknowledges that "it affords two insights: (1) Man is the creator of the universe of religion and in his creative process his worldly experiential method is bound to enter. (2) Like the new-born infant, freshly separated from his mother's body, the universe of religion created by man, separate as it is from the outside world, is not entirely alienated... symbol is the beginning and end of the universe of religion. This universe does not proceed from the object but from the symbol... Man does not create myth or symbol of his own volition. These quantitative social objects are born, develop and die like a natural object. And their place is taken by new symbols and myths."

Dr. Harbhajan Singh agrees with the Marxist view that Sufi poetry is indifferent to political and social situations. "When Sikh society was striving to defend itself, a rigid unitary tone was necessary for its survival. Against this, neo-Muslim society had secured its self-defiance; it had freed itself from a rigid discipline and was endeavouring to accept its new comparatively easy life." This is perilously near to a political interpretation.

SSS

Tejwant Singh Gill (b. 1928)

The most promising modern critic is Tejwant Singh Gill. His viewpoint is rather para-Marxist, but he is cautious enough not to lose his dialectic materialist moorings. In his essay, "Lekhak Te Raj Satta" (The Writer and the State) included in his collection titled *Punjabi Sabhyachar*, 1985, he has sought to prove that the writer has to embrace in his view both the social microcosm of the individual and the macrocosm of the State. He has seen this attempt made in Guru Nanak, but the Guru, according to him, integrates the two on a rather metaphysical level. No Punjabi writer after him has even partially succeeded in this but in the modern period there is hope of such success. "Our state is neither a source of enlightenment nor an agency of domination," he writes. "It subscribes to the consciousness of the modern age, socialism, but in its working, it affords no proof of being socialist."

Surveying, in another essay, Punjabi poetry in its communicational aspect, he says, "Only Guru Nanak's poetry rises to the high level of a people's collective life." From modern poetry alone, he says, "arises hope of its acquiring the power to shape life. But no living poet, not even Mohan Singh or Amrita Pritam has as yet shown this power and that a new poet has yet to arise to show this power. Tracing the ancestry of the modern Punjabi novel to our Kissa literature, he remarks the tendency to limit its philosophy to the solution of the problems of specific individuals, as in Waris Shah, "our novelists are only prose Kissa writers." In another essay ("Punjabi Novel"), he says: "The Punjabi novel written between 1960 and 1970 reflects two main tendencies. Those written about rural life are traditional in both form and content, more mythological than historical, and lyrical in the old way, incapable of expressing the internal life of our culture." The novels written about urban life are experimental in both form and content. They emphasise the present so much that it has become a one-dimensional myth, and the analysis of the psyche in them does not depict the three-dimensional social situation. Today urban life and rural life are getting closer to each other. This nearness has to be sunk into the artistic consciousness. If it is done in the collective context, it will serve the interests of socialism," which Dr. Gill regards as the ideal of social life. "However, it can enlighten the path of non-socialist writers also."

SSS

Pritam Singh IAS (b. 1932)

Reading Pritam Singh's treatise *Prativad* (Counterpoint), one is distressed to find that the state of affairs in Punjabi literary criticism remains as feudal and as irresponsible in complexion as ever. In a painstakingly researched preface to the volume, the author has painted a heart-breaking picture of uninformed and utterly arbitrary state of the so called literary criticism in Punjabi. He has spared none from highest to lowest. The facts that he has brought out proof, if proof is needed, that the type of criticism obtaining in the language is creating distortions that are going to have far-reaching repercussions in the academic fabric. It is feared that the student of Punjabi literature tomorrow may have to rewrite the literary history of our time. A revolution in letters is going to turn the tables on some of us. It must come. Truth must prevail.

The harbingers of this change are going to be honest, hard-working, no-nonsense writers like Pritam Singh. Not that one agrees with all his formulations but one cannot doubt at all the sincerity of his intention. He may appear to be a little hasty here and there, but there is no doubt that he tries to be and remains objective. He is clear-headed and painstaking.

Having painted the contemporary scene in as lurid a manner as possible, Pritam Singh goes on to illustrate what well-informed, assiduously researched objective criticism is by his own example.

Apvad comprises an assortment of essays written from time to time on various aspects of literary activity in the Punjabi language. A few of them are in the form of letters written to editors of journals on controversies here and there. But every time he wields his pen, the author is cogent, candid and appears convincing. Though written on odd occasions and on odd topics, the author has tried to present the essays in three well-defined sections called *Vad, Vivad* and *Prativad*. He seems to enjoy controversies, he interacts, enters into an argument and demolishes what he considers to be unacceptable with facts and figures marshalled in the manner of a seasoned strategist.

But what impresses one most is the fund of information that he brings to bear upon the subject that he deals with. His essays on 'Class Struggle and Literature', 'Ghazal' and 'Obscenity in Punjabi Writing' are carefully researched, investigative, doing fullest justice to the respective themes. His acquaintance with writing in the

language is prodigious. He quotes from various sources embracing writing at varied levels.

Pritam Singh is no stickler for form as such and the rules of prosody etc. Writing on the *Ghazal*, he says, "Professor Mohan Singh is a great scholar of Urdu and Persian but according to Sadhu Singh Hamdard, 'every verse written by him suffers from seven mistakes'. But despite these objections, an odd *aroozia* may deny Mohan Singh's eminence as a poet but no lover of literature would ever do so." Similarly, writing about Jagtar in the same essay, the author remarks in his typical sting-in-the-tale manner, "Jagtar read a paper on *Ghazal* in the annual function of Jagatpur Likhari Sabha and pointed out the lack of acquaintance of Punjabi poets with the fundamentals of *Arooz*. But when he was reading his own *Ghazal*, Darshan Singh 'Awara' rose and pointed out errors in his composition."

Yet another feature that distinguishes Pritam Singh from the general run of those who indulge in criticism in Punjabi is the lucidity of his language. He is simple and concise. Our experience is that most of the writing in Punjabi by way of literary criticism is turgid, involved, heavily loaded with precious and highly Sanskritised idiom.

The difficulty with the Punjabi reader is that he seldom reads. And when he does so, he does not assert his right to be taken seriously, otherwise there would not be so many printing errors, lack of uniformity of spelling, not to speak of indifferent content.

As a genre, criticism is, perhaps, in no happy state in Punjabi literature. Something will have to be done about it. The initiative must come from the universities. What we need is a team of watchdogs who must take faulty writing to task as it appears in print. It is done in Marathi. It is done in Bengali. A lot of writing that goes uncommented upon in Punjabi would be torn to bits in any other Indian language.

KSD

18

Punjabi Studies

The teaching of Punjabi has had a chequered career. Until our Independence, Punjabi was never the state language of the province. Maharaja Ranjit Singh did patronise Punjabi, but Persian continued to be the language of the court. The Britishers made no bones about it. They believed in promoting English because, according to Macaulay, "whoever knows that language has ready access to all the vast intellectual wealth which all the wisest nations of the earth have created and hoarded in the course of ninety generations". If at all, they gave quarter to any vernacular in the Punjab, it was Urdu. That too, for sinister political ends to keep the people divided. Somehow they convinced the Muslims of the Punjab that Urdu and not Punjabi was their mother-tongue. The Punjabi Muslims changed their mind immediately after the creation of Pakistan. They swear by Punjabi today.

Maharaja Patiala gave Punjabi the status of State language along with Urdu in 1911. However, it was in 1942 that the teaching of Punjabi was made compulsory in the primary and middle schools in the state. The next landmark was the declaration of Punjabi as the court language in the then PEPSU State in 1948. India had in the meanwhile gained Independence and Punjabi was included in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution of India and came to be recognised as one of the 15 languages of the country.

However, controversy about the status of Punjabi in the Punjab persisted until the creation of Punjabi Suba in 1966. It was the Punjab (State) Language Act 1967 which declared Punjabi in Gurmukhi script as the sole official language of the new Punjab State at all levels.

Punjabi now came to be accepted as a medium of instruction at the school and college stage. Punjabi is even allowed as an

alternative medium of examination for certain subjects at the post-graduate level.

This happy position has been obtaining for the last several years and yet the ground facts are heart-breaking. It is found that Punjabi is not given the importance that it ought to be given at the primary school level. Schools in the Punjab devote 23 hours per week as against 50–60 hours per week in developed countries like the USSR, Germany and Australia to the teaching of the mother-tongue. The training in teaching of Punjabi at the post-graduate level is utterly unsatisfactory. Hardly has any training college been equipped with tools for the teaching of Punjabi. There are no language laboratories. The libraries are poorly equipped.

An investigation conducted in Patiala district in respect of the teaching of Punjabi in the primary schools some time ago revealed that "nearly 33% of teachers have not gone beyond the 8th class and 42% of our teachers have no training in the art and technique of teaching Punjabi."† The study goes on to say that "92% of schools are without any library or even a book corner, 84% are such schools where no journals or newspapers find their way."

Primary education in Punjabi is the responsibility of the Government. And considering that 98% of students in the age-group 6–11 are said to have been enrolled in the primary schools, it would be a great pity if the present unsatisfactory conditions are allowed to continue.

Be that as it may, the part played by some senior teachers of Punjabi at the University level is creditable. It has gone a long way in fostering Punjabi learning and also promoting creative writing. In fact some of the University teachers like Dr. Mohan Singh, Sant Singh Sekhon, Prof. Mohan Singh, Dr. Harbhajan Singh, Dr. Attar Singh and Dr. Dalip Kaur Tiwana are better known as creative writers. The tender care with which they nursed talent in Punjabi writing in the various fields as guides and teachers has produced a crop of writers during the sensitive years of the development of Punjabi literature in modern times.

More important among them are Dr. Pritam Singh, Prof. Surinder Singh Kohli and Dr. Harnam Singh Shan.

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†*A Critical Assessment of the Teaching of Punjabi* by Dr. Inderpal Singh

Pritam Singh (b. 1918)

Starting his career as lecturer in Punjabi at Doaba College, Jalandhar, Professor Pritam Singh shifted to Sikh National College, Lahore the next year where he served as a teacher in Punjabi until 1947. Joining the Punjab Education Service after Partition he rose to be Principal, Government College, Ludhiana and then Brijendra College, Faridkot but he continued his involvement in Punjabi teaching. He retired as Head of Guru Nanak Studies in Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar in 1980.

He has several publications of prose of ideas and research to his credit. More important among them are: *Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha* published by Guru Nanak Dev University, *Dr. Mohan Singh*, published by the Language Department, Patiala and *Khushal Singh Khattak* published by Punjabi University, Patiala. He has also translated Prem Chand and Rajinder Singh Bedi's short stories from Urdu into Punjabi together with a few works from Persian and Hindi. More important among the books edited by him are *Paras Bhag, Nav Nidh, Shakarganj,* and *Shah Behram.* He has also written for children. His books on Maharaja Ranjit Singh are a delightful piece of writing.

KSD

Surinder Singh Kohli (b. 1920)

Dr. Surinder Singh Kohli, who served as Head of the Punjabi Department in the Punjab University for 17 years before he retired from service, is like Dr. Harbhajan Singh both a creative writer and a critic. He is the author of *Gurudev* (1944), a *Mahakavya* (epic) and a topographical novel entitled *Paron Aye Char Jane* (1952), besides a number of other works. He is, therefore, better equipped to assess and appreciate literary activity.

Surinder Singh Kohli was one of the earliest chroniclers of the history of Punjabi literature. His work *Punjabi Sahitya da Ithas* (History of Punjabi Literature) published in 1942 was popular with students of Punjabi literature for several years until he took over editing of the multiple-volume History of Punjabi Literature (*Punjabi Sahitya da Ithas*) for the Publication Bureau of the University.

Another aspect of Dr. Surinder Singh's specialisation is in the field of Sikh religion and Sufi tradition. He has written on Guru

Nanak (*Guru Nanak—Jiwan Darshan te Kavya Kala*), Guru Tegh Bahadur (*Jiwan, Sama te Rachna*), Sheikh Farid, Professor Puran Singh, Bhai Mani Singh, Bulleh Shah and Bhai Vir Singh. All these works bear the stamp of painstaking research and clarity of thinking.

As a post-graduate teacher he has guided research in Punjabi literature for doctoral theses with devotion and exceptional academic commitment and flung open the portals of research in Punjabi which, somehow, remained barred to his predecessors, in the Punjab University which was the only learned body in the State until the coming into being of the Punjabi Suba.

KSD

Harnam Singh Shan (b. 1923)

Harnam Singh Shan was Head of the Department of Punjabi in Punjab University from 1959 to 1962 retiring as Chairman, Department of Sikh Studies, in 1984. He has been engaged in post-graduate teaching and research as well as in writing, editing and producing Punjab University publications during his earlier tenure as Editor-cum-senior lecturer in the same university. He has also served as Principal Project Investigator, University Grants Commission, engaged in a major Research Project in Sikh Studies.

Harnam Singh is best known for his research work on poet Hasham's romance of Sassi Punnu entitled *Sassi Hasham* (1956). It is a treatise of manifold research on the legend, the poet and the critical appraisal of the text as obtaining today.

Another significant publication of Harnam Singh is on *Japji* entitled *Guru Nanak da Shahkar* (Guru Nanak's Masterpiece) in which he has discussed literary, historical and philosophical aspects of the well-known Sikh scripture by Guru Nanak.

Similarly, he has produced perceptive works on Puran Singh and Bhai Vir Singh.

Dr. Shan is a widely travelled and strenuously hard-working litterateur who has guided research for doctorates and other learned projects.

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Afterword

There must be a gap of a couple of generations, maybe more, before creative writing of a particular period can be evaluated with objectivity and fuller justice. Reviewing a publication or any other work of art is different, but passing an absolute judgement requires a certain distance from the creative phenomenon to be fair to it. In the forties his admirers talked about T.S. Eliot differently; they remember him in quite different terms today about half a century later. In Punjabi literature we have adored Waris Shah for generations, while there are not a few who have now started finding fault with him. Bhai Vir Singh is perhaps a better instance to support this contention. He was universally admired during his life-time. Immediately after his passing-away in 1957, it was felt that he lived a cloistered life; he seldom encountered social reality, his contribution to the freedom struggle was minimal, but today a great many of his so-called detractors have veered around to claim him as the undisputed maker of modern Punjabi literature.

This work may sound convincing in parts and may, perhaps, need to be revised in others in times to come. Long-distance shots are, invariably, more reliable in evaluation of literary writing than close-ups.

Like fashions, literary criticism, too, undergoes changes from time to time. It has its own ups and downs, revolutions, and rediscoveries. It is of necessity a cycled metamorphosis, metamorphenomenon.

KSD

Appendix IA

The Punjabi Writer Abroad

The Punjabi writer going abroad as an expatriate and yet remaining in close touch with the land and people of his birth is no new phenomenon. The Ghaddarites had wished to undo the shackles of British rule by sowing the seeds of sedition from abroad. With this end in view, they produced substantial literature including a newspaper which they smuggled into the homeland regularly.

A survey conducted recently revealed that there were not less than one hundred Punjabi writers with at least one publication to the credit of each one of them in the United Kingdom alone. Similarly East Asia, West Asia, East Africa, Europe, the USA, Canada and the West Indies have a number of Punjabi writers, some of whom are celebrated names today. In countries like Singapore, the UK, the USA and Canada, they have their own printing presses in Punjabi which sustain their newspapers and other publications. The UK has a weekly in Punjabi entitled *Des Pardes* with circulation exceeding that of any Punjabi weekly back home.

Some of the more important expatriate Punjabi writers are Raghubir Dhand, Tarsem Nilgiri, Swaran Chandan, Amarjit Chandan, Kailash Puri, Sherjang Jangli, Sathi Ludhianvi, Shivcharan Gill and Autar in the UK, Amar Jyoti in Holland, Sati Kumar in Sweden, Sohan Kadri in Denmark, Ravinder Ravi, Iqbal Ramoowalia, Surjit Kalsi, Ajmer Rode, Navtej Bharati and Gyani Kesar Singh in Canada, Sher Singh Kanwal in the USA and Ajaib Kamal and Sohan Singh 'Josh' in Kenya.

All of them have authored books—poetry, fiction, drama etc., the main theme of their writing being agony of the emigrant, besides, of course, sharing their experience of life in the country of their domicile.

Talking about the agony of the expatriate, one is reminded of a poem by Ravinder Ravi, a Punjabi poet of uncommon promise. Ravi is presently domiciled in New Aiyanah, Canada. Earlier he was in East Africa for several years. A teacher by profession, Ravi writes both short fiction and verse. According to some, his poetry is better than his short stories, while others believe that his short stories are superior to his poetry. In the poem "Maan da ik Parchhawan" (Shadow of the Mother) he speaks about his motherland with nostalgia.

The gossamer swabs of *aak*
Are scattered in the air
In search of self-identity
They roam all over countries and continents
Inside out and outside in
The light chases its reflection
Looking for motherhood in the mother-tongue
Nameless they yearn
Long for their roots
Those with roots have their dreams
Lost in the skies
Where can they subsist
All places are alien
Worldly attachments have many an address
The mother has only one.

There are a number of publications dealing with this theme exclusively. A few of them published recently are: *Mere Parat Aaun Tak* (Until I Return) by Avtar and *Ik Khat* (A Letter) by Baldev Bawa. And no less Ravinder Ravi's new collection of verse entitled *Sheeshe te Dastak* (A Knock on the Mirror) which has more than one poem devoted to this theme. All the three volumes are, of course, authored by Punjabi poets domiciled abroad.

In his longer poem "Mere parat aaun tak" that lends its title to the book, Avtar presents the entire gamut of tender emotions that an emigrant experiences. It includes the misgivings of the old parents, the gloom in the village and the heart-rending pangs of the womenfolk at the time of his departure.

Bapu's half-wet beard trembled,
Mother hid her tears putting her hand on my head,

The birds flew with me for long,
The roads and paths rose to cling to me.
In the village common
They talked again about those who had gone away,
And their parents shed tears again
For those who had not returned

It includes fervent hopes of returning to the motherland after he has liquidated old debts accumulating on the family, bettered his own lot and settled the children suitably. It also includes awareness of the price that he might have to pay for it in hard labour and arduous conditions of work in an alien land. But he could never imagine the loss of self-respect, the indignities that would pile upon him at every step, the insult in the situation; a coloured man slaving for the white:

Mother, the silver-coloured people of this alien land
Laugh at us time and again,
The silver-coloured girls of this place across the seas
Stare at us, the copper-coloured;
Their silver-coloured thoughts have hatred
And malign those of the colour of steel.

He suffers this lot day and night. He pines for the motherland year after year. Having lived abroad under miserable conditions, he finds himself a changed man. Looking around he has grave misgivings. Maybe his own village will no more accept him. Maybe when he returns, he finds his village a changed place:

Maybe by the time I return
My village becomes a stranger to me
And I am condemned to live in the silver-coloured land.

Baldev Bawa's *Ik Khat* (A Letter) is another longer poem in which the poet laments the lot of an emigrant in the form of a letter to his mother. It is believed that in poetry it is the theme which determines the depth of emotions at which one can express one's thoughts convincingly. Baldev Bawa is equally poignant and full of remorse for having left the land of his birth.

Now when I am reminded of my village
From across the sea
I have a plaintive cry in the mellow sunlight of the day

And a whisper out of the quiet of the night
Saying who dies in an alien land
Dies a vain death
And the motherland
Never mourns his passing-away.

It tortures him to find himself rootless, nameless, a coloured intruder who must be repatriated sooner or later. His labours are spat at by the white woman and his suicide is laughed at by the white man:

Here I am only a lost, imageless immigrant
Like the forlorness of a solitary face
After the dead body is
Moved away from the threshold.

In his poem "Emigrant" Ravinder Ravi tells this tale of woe of a Punjabi who has had to live abroad to earn his living. A conscious creative writer, Ravi's soul is tortured at the neglect of his mother-tongue, the words of an alien language leave his lips like roasted grams flitting the oven:

Like a moon my mother-tongue
Oozes out of my heart
And then is precipitated like
A paste on my lips.
Where is the oasis of our culture, our heritage over here?
The phrases of the alien tongue
Are roasted in the oven of my mouth and fumble.

These books are like a whiff of fresh air, introducing new themes, painting scenes of life in faraway lands and experimenting with unfamiliar techniques practised abroad.

Of late there has been a spate of them. Of these, *Do Kinare* (Two Banks), a collection of short stories, edited by Amarjit Chandan provides a peep into the working of the mind of the Punjabi-speaking people abroad.

It is an anthology of 12 short stories by Punjabi writers living in the UK. Hardly can anyone of them claim to be a front-rank practitioner of the genre and yet more than half the stories in the collection are first-rate writing. They eminently bring home the loves, longings and frustrations of the Punjabis living abroad. As the title *Do Kinare* suggests, these stories relate to people torn

between two loves; the love of their land of birth and the love of making more and more money in a foreign country. And in this way they cover a whole gamut of emotions. What with the pull of the motherland and the racial discrimination in the land of their domicile, at times they appear to lead sterile lives, living in the land to which they cannot belong, longing to go back where they cannot return. This is what happens to Pokhar Singh in Tarsem's story. Sick of racial discrimination, he comes back home. He wishes to settle in his village. And yet no one among his people is willing to accept that he should give up his job abroad where he would have better opportunities to further the prospects of his children, get them better education, and find them more lucrative occupations. In "Teeji Akh" (The Third Eye), Raghubir Dhand depicts the abominable character of racial discrimination in his typical subtle manner. Whatever the coloured people may do for the white residents, they are never acceptable to them. Their prejudices are much too deep-rooted. What is more distressing is the emotional readjustment, which it seems the domiciled fail to make, even those who have been residing abroad for decades. Baldev Singh's short story "Chudel" (The Witch) and K.C. Mohan's "Pari" (The Fairy) make heart-rending reading. Bhaiya Pritam Singh cannot imagine his middle-aged wife Bhagwanti entertaining a moment of their youthful amour in her newly-acquired self-confidence after she had started working in a factory and earning her pay-packet every week. He is outraged at her advances and snubs her callously. K.C. Mohan's "Pari" (The Fairy) cannot shake off the inhibitions that she has inherited from her mother's mother. He may be a drunkard, a profligate, an abominable creature, yet a wedded wife and mother of his child, she cannot make up her mind to go over to another man. The only time Kailash Puri's Bachni revolts is in her dream. Sathi Ludhianvi's short story entitled "Aatishbazi" (The Fireworks) talks about sex as not many of us can do here back home and Surjeet Virdi has a brilliant symbolic piece in "Makhian" (Flies). It is an experimental writing, quite different from what the common Punjabi reader is used to.

The short story in Punjabi is a fairly developed genre. These stories should help carry it a step forward.

Another significant collection of short stories on the theme is entitled *Agharwasi* by Ravinder Ravi containing stories written in the last three decades. The expatriate in Ravi brings home to the

Punjabi reader vivid pictures of life in Kenya and Canada and various other countries of Europe that he has visited or stayed in. He is uninhibited and invariably narrates his story with telling effect. The collection contains stories and anti-stories, poetic narratives and dramatic monologues.

Among the leading Punjabi writers domiciled abroad Ravinder Ravi and Ajaib Kamal are, perhaps, the most prolific. They acquit themselves creditably whatever genre they handle whether it is poetry, fiction or drama. Says Ravi "Writing (in Punjabi) for me is neither a hobby nor a pastime. It is a hunger, a necessity of life, like the yearning to live, a habit, the physical need to breathe. My conviction is that a writing is the author's creative personification and his perceptive experience its spinal chord."

KSD

Appendix IB

Punjabi Studies in Pakistan

Conflicting reports about Punjabi studies in Pakistan persist. Dr. Attar Singh of Punjab University, Dr. Karnail Singh Thind formerly of Guru Nanak Dev University and Dr. Jagtar of Government College, Hoshiarpur continue to be euphoric and yet there are not a few who are totally cynical about such studies. While Punjabi journals in India feature new Punjabi writing being produced in Pakistan regularly, it is not always on considerations of merit. Most of it has only "the charm of distance."

However, it cannot be denied that there is a sea-change in Pakistan's perceptions, particularly in West Punjab in respect of the Punjabi language. They seem to have realised at long last that Punjabi and not Urdu is their mother-tongue and barring the proverbial exceptions that prove the rule, any worthwhile creative activity is possible only in one's own mother-tongue. This has resulted in a rich harvest of literary talent in the short period of about four decades since the creation of Pakistan.

During his posting in Delhi, Munir A. Sheikh, Counsellor (Press), Pakistan used to regale distinguished audiences of intellectuals and creative artistes with his verse. The more one listened to the well read and widely travelled Munir, the more one felt that the type of writing that he did can be done in one's own mother-tongue only. The imagery, the symbol and the use of myth lend a peculiar charm to Munir's verse:

Blindfolding myself
I am in search of one
Who is not to be found,
Thoughts
Are hidden left and right,
The meanings are concealed behind words

And play hide and seek;
I look for them
I shout for them.

It is a remarkably tender piece reflecting the futile search of a people groping in the dark for self-expression. A poet with rare sensibility, Munir had a subtle manner of commenting on the oddities in the social scene around him.

Whether it is Faiz or Fahmida Riaz, Munir Sheikh or Zohra Nigah, anyone from across the border brings with him or her a train-load of nostalgic memories. The Punjabis in India leave no stone unturned to lionise them. This is equally true of Punjabi publications in Pakistan. Since they continue to stick to the Persian script, an endeavour is made here to transcribe and publish anything worthwhile done by them. Jagtar, one of the promising new poets with a doctorate on contemporary Punjabi writing in Pakistan, seems to have devoted himself exclusively to projecting the Punjabi literary activity in West Punjab for readers in India. Deepak Publishers of Jalandhar have started a series of publications aimed at this good-neighbourly cause. *Sufi Kavya te Usda Pachhokar* by Syed Ali Abbas Jabalpuri is the fourth title in the series. It is the fifth book produced by the Punjabi Adbi Board established in Pakistan under Sibtul Hasan Zaigham, a leading Punjabi litterateur. The book is entitled *Wehdatul Wujood te Punjabi Shairi* in the original.

That the title of the book had to be changed in order that it should be meaningful for Punjabi readers on this side of the border reflects a heart-breaking irony in the situation.

The people of West Punjab who swore by Urdu until the other day have apparently realised their mistake and taken to Punjabi, but they continue to stick to the Persian script. That it is inadequate is accepted in all quarters. On the other hand, the Gurmukhi script is simpler and more suitable for the language for which it was evolved. What seems to go against it is the mistaken notion that it was introduced by the Sikh gurus and, therefore, is identified with the Sikh religion. While there is no doubt that the Sikh gurus had the vision to adopt it and then popularise it, it has been proved by reliable research that the Gurmukhi script was in use long before them. It went through various stages of evolution before it came to be what it is today.

The use of the Persian script by Punjabi writers in West Punjab is making their language drift in diction and idiom away from the

mainstream of the Punjabi language in India. That Punjabi intellectuals and researchers in West Punjab were not familiar with the Gurmukhi script in which a lot of Punjabi writing has been done and substantial literary research undertaken in modern times seem to be creating unfortunate distortions. Both these features are abundantly evident.

The author Syed Jabalpuri has been nurtured mainly on Punjabi literature in the Persian script and he employs Persian and Arabic terms and phrases for which simpler equivalents are in frequent use on this side of the border. Some of these that would appear unfamiliar to the average Punjabi reader are: *Irfan, Hissyat, Madrak.*

Similarly his not being conversant with the Gurmukhi script and hence his unfamiliarity with the vast Punjabi literature available in Gurmukhi, handicaps Syed Jabalpuri. Besides misquoting Guru Nanak and other Bhaktas, his use of common words and phrases at places is wrong e.g., *Samagam, Sampadik, Sampad* etc.

It seems the author has tried to bite more than he can chew. The information presented is, to say the least, undigested. There are sweeping statements such as "Buddhism is neither religion nor philosophy," the "Bhaktas (not excluding Guru Nanak and Kabir) were not bothered about reforming society and fighting evils." Similarly, there are unverified statements like "Guru Nanak having been beholden to Kabir", etc.

It is amazing that while tracing the historical background, the author comes up to Ranjit Singh's period and then suddenly stops with the advent of British rule. There is no mention of some of the vital writing done in Punjabi by Bhai Vir Singh, Puran Singh, and later by Mohan Singh, Amrita Pritam and recently by Jaswant Singh Neki. No discussion of Sufi poetry is possible without reference to the mystic element in the writings of some of these stalwarts of Punjabi poetry.

It is said that there are less than half a dozen Punjabi writers in Pakistan who can read Punjabi in Gurmukhi script. An attempt made by Satnam Mahmud, the Sikh daughter of the noted Punjabi writer, the late S.S. Charan Singh Shaheed, married to a Muslim political activist and settled in Lahore, had to be given up for lack of any serious interest.

Besides Fakhar Zaman's *Sat Gwache Lok*, there are just three other novels. These are: *Theda* by Abdul Majid Bhatti (since banned for obscenity), Afzal Ahsan Randhawa's *Diva te Darya* and Salim Khan

Gimmi's *Sanjh*. Since the theatre movement is still struggling to gain momentum, there are hardly any worthwhile plays. The entire output by way of literary criticism would take "not more than 20 pages of space in a doctoral thesis."

There is no short story writer meriting any serious notice. As regards poetry, the writers are galore but most of them are stage-poets or those who write for Punjabi films which are very popular in Pakistan these days. There is only one monthly journal entitled *Maan Boli* that appears regularly. The Punjabi writers finance their own books and the print-run is miserably low: less than 500 copies! They write their own reviews and get them published in the name of their friends.

Says Salim Khan Gimmi: "It was after the liberation of Bangladesh that the Punjabi intellectuals underwent a spiritual crisis. They felt remorse at their ignoring their mother-tongue. They started believing that they could best express themselves in Punjabi alone. Urdu appeared to them as an alien tongue. The refugees from U.P. and Bihar spoke far more idiomatic Urdu than they could ever do. Urdu had become the language of the rulers, it could never be the language of the masses in West Punjab. If we wish to reach the people and share their dreams, we must write in their language."

Be that as it may, there is also no denying the fact that the people in West Punjab will take time to shake off their predilection for Urdu.

KSD

Appendix II

Problems of the New Writer in Punjabi

The general trend of writing in Punjabi is wholesome. Barring a few traditionalists who are not taken seriously, new Punjabi writing at all levels is fairly forward. What is a matter of concern is the equipment of the new writer in Punjabi. He may be a progressive, a fellow-traveller, an experimentalist, or a conformist, he gives one the impression of a man in a hurry. A university degree is hardly enough. He has not read his classics. His acquaintance with literature in the sister languages of India is meagre. His knowledge of the great masters in the more important foreign languages is inadequate. There is no evidence of struggle in his life. His predecessors had to fight the British. It was a great adventure, a rich experience. The whole country was emotionally surcharged for decades. There were slogans, processions, persecutions and many martyrdoms. Worse enemies than foreign rulers still remain in the country. We have to fight poverty, illiteracy, backwardness and, last but not least, the inequality in our society. Committed as we are to the non-violent way, this fight is going to be long-drawn and slow. The new writer must have a sense of involvement. His equipment has to have two dimensions. He must, in the first instance, know the literary traditions. In the second place, he must identify himself with the new movements. He must know his people. This identification can be effected at various levels. The new India is not going to be altogether a peasant's India. The new writer, therefore, must equip himself with ability to face the challenges of the new society and shoulder the responsibilities of a new age. He has to re-orientate himself, widen his sympathies, sharpen his sensibilities, and develop a sense of involvement.

The new writer in Punjabi has his own frustrations and one must sympathise with him. This probably he shares with his generation elsewhere also. The editors of established literary journals are chary of giving him his due place in their columns. He is therefore obliged to start his own magazines, which are difficult to maintain. They die sooner than he imagines. There are long queues at the publisher, who is unimaginative and unsympathetic. More often than not, the new writer has to finance his own publications. But then the reader, whose taste is not cultivated, is apathetic; he needs first to be educated. This is a long process.

There was a time in the thirties and early forties when Khalsa College, Amritsar, was the Mecca of Punjabi men of letters. The litterateur Prof. Teja Singh, the poet Mohan Singh, the short story writer Sant Singh Sekhon, and the critic Gurbachan Singh "Talib" were on its staff. Gopal Singh "Dardi" and Pritam Singh "Safeer" were among the students. It was here that the first collection of Mohan Singh's poems was compiled under the personal guidance of Prof. Teja Singh. It was here that Sant Singh Sekhon wrote his early short stories including `Pemi de Niyane', which ushered in a new era in Punjabi fiction. It was here that "Dardi" and "Safeer" blossomed in their promising talent. It was here that Duggal brought his first collection of short stories in manuscript form and read them to Sant Singh Sekhon. It is common knowledge that Prof. Teja Singh used to collect college students at his house on the premises and read to them poems from *Save Puttar,* Mohan Singh's first collection of verse. Later, as principal of the Mohindra College, Patiala, even the chief minister would be among the audience who came to listen to readings from new writing in Punjabi. Duggal's novel *Andran* was read there in parts immediately after its publication. Ever since Khalsa College lost these eminent litterateurs, Punjabi writing has been deprived of a seat from where it got direction and sound evaluation of its literary output. After Teja Singh's passing away, there is no one who would welcome the new writer with tender care and encourage him with generous praise. The Language Department of the Punjab Government, the Punjab University at Chandigarh, the Punjabi University at Patiala and the Guru Nanak Dev University at Amritsar could, perhaps, provide such leadership but they have so far failed to do so. Maybe, they are much too preoccupied with organisational

and academic problems. Spotting talent and nursing it requires a dedication to the cause which is becoming rare in our society today. Gur Baksh Singh of *Preet Lari* did his bit in his own way. But the editor of a journal like the *Preet Lari* had his limitations. He was committed in more than one way. In these circumstances, to whom should the new writer turn?

Another difficulty with the new writer is that he does not have his roots deep enough in the native soil. Mohan Singh came from a village. Sant Singh Sekhon belongs to a peasant family. Teja Singh was born and brought up in a village. Most of the writers belonging to the younger generation are city-born, with the experience of a society which is still in the melting pot. The younger generation is still bewildered under the impact of new forces and progressive thinking. The present generation has come out of the village and the new generation born in the industrial society is still to grow out of its infancy. The new writer is neither here nor there. It is a queer society, a strange mixture of contradictions we have in the Indian town today. Such a society can be interesting for those who can view it from a distance but those who are embroiled in it are often demoralised and confused. Some of the short stories written by senior writers about the social scene in our urban life today are fascinating. Some poems by Pritam Singh "Safeer", Amrita Pritam and Harbhajan Singh are indeed interesting. But most often the new poets who attempt to portray their own problems give the impression of being frustrated and angry. It requires a mature pen to write great literature about small people. I pick up a poem from a monthly journal at random:

It is late evening.
The sun has sunk into the earth.
A passenger has missed his bus,
And is struggling here and there;
He peeps into every window of the booking office.
He waves, in vain, to the passing cars.
He runs after tongas and trucks,
But he fails.
The shadows of the evening are deepening.
The bitter cold of his mind and body
Is biting him every moment.
Then he thinks—
Has he anyone in this big city?

And the poor he,
Defeated and broken,
Goes towards a caravanserai,
You are also like him.

—Surinder Gill

This despair and confusion are equally true of the short story. Bachint writes about an impotent husband. Dissatisfied, the wife goes and sleeps with the neighbour. A young girl writing this can be very exciting!

But it is perhaps not fair to lay all the blame at the door of the new writer. He does have promise. He is earnest and serious about his job. He has started well and is on his way. But the great question still remains: where is he going?

KSD

Appendix III

Translation as an Integrating Factor

Translation is a vital integrating factor. It helps demolish citadels of cultural isolationism. It fosters understanding and brings people closer together. It enriches a language and widens the sympathies of its readers. It brings the knowledge and experience of the whole world to one's door-step.

It is an essential ingredient of the free flow of information. Said Mahatma Gandhi:

> I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the culture of all lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any of them. Mine is not a religion of the prison-house. It has room for the least among God's creation. But it is proof against insolent pride of race, religion or colour.

And yet translation as a weapon for fighting ignorance and alienation, parochialism and chauvinism has not been fully exploited, more particularly, by the developing countries.

Punjabi literature is no exception. Neither has considerable writing in other Indian and foreign languages been rendered into Punjabi nor have outstanding writings in Punjabi been projected into other languages substantially. It is because the hurdles in the way are legion. Literary and artistic activity is the first casualty in the unseemly rat-race for priorities in the developing world. Our first anxiety is to bring about universal literacy and create the necessary tools for it. In India, for instance, Article 45 of the Constitution provides that the State shall endeavour to provide within a period of 10 years from the commencement of the Constitution for free and compulsory education for all children

until they complete the age of 14 years. This time-limit lapsed more than three decades ago. The percentage of literacy in India today (excluding the age-group 0– 4) is 35 only. We are far from providing suitable reading material to the literates and especially to the neo-literates.

The foremost task before a translation is launched is the identification of the work meriting translation into another language or other languages. And language being a formidable barrier at times, literary works of excellence remain hidden from the next-door neighbours. In India a good many of us in the North heard about Takazhi Sivasankara Pillai only after his novel *Chameen* was translated into English and published in England under UNESCO auspices. Similarly even the serious students among us in the North heard about K. V. Puttappa, a Kannada poet, for the first time when he won the coveted Bharatiya Jnanpith Award in 1968. This task becomes more difficult when it is proposed to project a writing to a different country in a faraway continent.

In order to resolve this problem we must agree upon a link language. As it is, knowledge of English helps an Indian reader to know about outstanding writing in the Soviet Union or for that matter in the USA or the UK earlier than a worthwhile writing in a sister Indian language. It is, therefore, imperative that translation of significant contemporary writing is available in a common language with an agency to ensure its circulation to the appropriate quarters. It could be Hindi alone in India.

Most of the developing countries were under colonial rule until recently. Ever since they gained their independence, they have been busy repairing the ravages of colonial exploitation, building their economy with dynamic developmental activity. And now they live under a constant threat of a nuclear conflagration. It is this common experience which is the best guarantee of the creative writing in one language of the region finding readership in another. What we need today is to create a reliable infrastructure for it.

And it is no easy task, either. It requires a competent organization with a network of devoted translators in various languages who could feed the nucleus outfit perennially and arrange for give-and-take, copyright and other issues remaining the responsibility of the central body to look after. It should also shoulder the responsibility of finding outlets for translations and publication of works to go to the rest of the world.

No less demanding is the physical act of translating a literary work from one language into another. Translation is an art. It is not mere transfer of a piece of writing from one language to another. It is transcreation. This calls for a measure of genius or talent of a high order.

The first requirement of an acceptable translator is intimate involvement. He must either understand the need of it or start enjoying it. Finding an apt word or an appropriate phrase that does fullest justice to the original can be a translator's delight, even his despair or bugbear A translator has to look for an idiom that communicates not only the sense of the original but also its flavour, its spirit. The rhythm of the original text must needs be transferred both in dialogues and in statements; like the subtle nuances of meanings, the music of a language can be highly baffling. It varies from language to language, from dialect to dialect.

There is a naughty saying in French that translation is like a wife; if she is faithful, she is not beautiful and if she is beautiful, she is not faithful! I believe translation can both be beautiful and faithful. It must carry the essence of the original, it need not be a verbatim rendering always. While translating Tagore, it is found that the poet had no hesitation in departing from the original text in his own translation into English. At times he skipped dialogues, at others even the sequences. While the author can take such liberties himself, it becomes difficult for a translator to do so. But if a translator is acquainted with the subject and has proficiency in the genre he is handling, he may take such liberties. It is more essential that the translated work should make sense and at the same time it must read well. It should read almost like the original.

I also believe that no matter how well done, no work is translated for good. Every generation has to make its own translation of its classics and other works of importance. The idiom changes, the images acquire different shades, the words shed their old connotations. Not infrequently a people read themselves in a writing. They like themselves to be reflected in their rendering of the original. It is said, "Every text is original because every translation is different."

While it is a fact that many of the best poems in a Western language are translations, people maintain that poetry doesn't lend itself to rendering in another language. Frost defined poetry

as 'what gets lost in translation'. One need not take too sceptical a view of it. A translator of poetry should be a poet himself and he must endeavour to succeed in creating an analogous effect by ever so many means at a creative writer's disposal.

The translator of a play may take liberties both with dialogues and the details of sequences in the interest of verisimilitude, clarity and society into whose language he decides to render the original. His loyalty is to the dramatic conflict, delineation of the plot and argument and the evolution of the characters as patterned in the original. A translator is not a slave, he is a confidant.

Fiction has a larger canvas. There is ever so much scope to deviate from and conform to the original that the total effect can be a piece of writing that is a recreation of the original text. It reads like the original. However, a short story being tightly constructed can strain the resources of the imagination and the sensibility of the translator. The translator of a short story succeeds if he can transmit the subtlest nuances of the theme and the characters depicted in the original.

A translator has his own anguish and frustration. More often than not, he finds that he figures nowhere. It is a thankless job. Neither the reader gives him any recognition nor has the author much regard for him. Says Vladimir Nabokov, the renowned author of *Lolita:*

> What is translation? On a platter
> A poet's pale and glaring head,
> A parrot's screech, a monkey's chatter
> And profanation of the dead.

Lastly, we must ensure readership before a translation project is launched. The reading habit being what it is in the developing countries, it at times becomes highly frustrating finding translated works gathering dust in godowns. There is no dearth of cynics who maintain that in a language when readers do not read their original writers, what chance is there for translated works to be read?

However, the fact remains that translation is a highly purposeful activity and it can go a long way in bringing the world together and also helping project our talent beyond our own frontiers.

The position with regard to Punjabi, as mentioned earlier, is dismal both in respect of translation into Punjabi of other language

works as well as translation of the Punjabi writings into the sister languages in India or those abroad.

Barring the Language Department of the Punjab Government which it has inhereted from PEPSU, some odd translations by the Sahitya Akademi and National Book Trust, India, not much has been done in the private sector.

A recent award for translations in various Indian languages announced by the Sahitya Akademi attracted some works for consideration of which the more important are: Chaman Nahal's *Azadi*, Khushwant Singh's *Short Stories*, Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, Wilkie Collin's *The Women in White*, Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield*, R.D. Blackmore's *Lorna Doone*, Ivan Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons*, G.B. Shaw's *Pygmalion*, Khalil Gibran's *The Prophet* and *The Broken Wings*, Pearl Buck's *The Other Gods*, Prakash Tandon's *Punjabi Century* from English and *Lal Ded* from Kashmiri, *Krishna Kavya Aur Surdas*, *Ram Charit Manas* and *Chiterlekha* from Hindi, *Vai Shakha* from Kannada and *Zafarnama* from Persian.

There is variety in the selection of titles but the output is meagre. The Language Department of the Punjab Government has produced a number of books in translation from English, Persian, Urdu and Hindi. They must, however, pause and ponder why their translated works have not been popular with readers.

The National Book Trust's series *Aadan Pradan* in which outstanding books in one Indian language are translated and published in all the other Indian languages recognised in the Constitution is laudable. The project, however, is moving at a snail's pace. Maybe because the books they have produced do not sell well. Some of the titles the National Book Trust has published in Punjabi are:

Tamil: Neela Padmanabhan's *Pallikondapuram*, P. Thooran's *Bharati's Prose Writings*, Kalki's *Alai Osai* and M.P. Somasundram's *Katha Bharati* (Tamil kahaniyan).

Telugu: Veerasalingam's *Sweya Charitram*, V.P. Rao and P.S. Sharma's Telugu short stories, Buchi Babu's *Chivaraku Migiledi*, Vishalakshmi's *Varadhi*.

Urdu: Qurratulain's *Aag Ka Darya*, Ali Sardar Jafri's *Nai Duniya Ko Salaam*, Maulana Abdul Haleem Sharar's *Guzashta Lucknow*, Razia Sajjad Zahir's *Urdu Short Stories*, Mohd. Hussain Azad's *Ab-E-Hayat*.

Assamese: L.N. Bora's *Ganga Chilanir Pankhi*.

Bengali: S.N. Bhaduri's *Jagri*, Atin Bondyopadhyaya's *Neelakantha Pakhir Khonje*, S. Mukhopadhyaya's *Ghun Poka* and Tarashankar Banerjee's *Kavi.*

Gujarati: A.M. Rawal's *Gujarati One-Act Plays* and Pannalal Patel's *Manaveni Bhavai.*

Hindi: Chandragupta Vidyalankar's Hindi *Ekanki*, Radhakrishna's *Best Short Stories of Prem Chand*, Phaneshwar Nath Renu's *Maila Anchal*, Yashpal's *Manushya Ke Roop*, Amritlal Nagar's *Boond Aur Samudra*, J.C. Mathur and Mohan Rakesh's *Hindi Full Length Plays*, Bhisham Sahni's *Tamas*, Vidyanivas Mishra's *Gati Aur Rekha*, Srilala Shukla's *Rag Darbari* and Bhagwati Charan Verma's *Bhule Bisre Chitra.*

Kannada: Shivram Karanth's *Ali Da Mele*, M.V. Iyengar's *Chikaveera Rajendra*, C.H. Nayak's *Anthology of Kannada Short Stories*, G.R. Iyengar's *Mere Gaon Ke Rasik* and Mirji Annarao's *Nisarga.*

Malayalam: N.N. Pillai's *Anthology of Malayalam Short Stories*, T.S. Pillai's *Eanippadikal* (*Siri Ke Dande*), M. Mukundan's *Recent Malayalam Short Stories.*

Marathi: S.V. Ketkar's *Brahman Kanya*, H.N. Apte's *Mee*, P.Y. Deshpande's *Suklele Phool*, and Madgulkar's *Bangarwadi.*

Oriya: Surendra Mohanty's *Neela Shaila* and Pranabandhukar and Manoranjan Das's *Sweeta Padma* and *Banaharsi.*

They have also translated and published Nanak Singh's *Chitta Lahu*, Dalip Kaur Tiwana's *Eh Hamara Jeewan* and Gurdial Singh's *Adh Chanani Raat* from Punjabi into other Indian languages along with Punjabi anthologies of short stories, one-act plays and full-length plays.

KSD

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